BREAK SPACE

The economy magazine for ZX Spectrum enthusiasts

Issue 1

Clouds part; Showtime

Reviewed :

Throbbing Headache

Bearded Fantasy

Master Piece

Jetpac Miner

SkillTeam

MoonRn

Plyuk

And Many More...

Over 33 reviews! But less than 35

Ernest Hemingway! Dorothy Macardle!

Doris Day! Infinite Soup!

Crossword! POKEs! Stuff!

Springtime for Speccy!

Editorial

What is this? Why would you do this? Have you gone mad?

All reasonable questions one might ask when presented with a magazine that primarily reviews brand new games for a very old computer.

In reverse order :

Clearly. Yes.

As to why, well, why ever not? In 2024, there were about 160 games released for the ZX Spectrum. This is a bizarrely high number for a platform that stopped being relevant to the world at large about 35 years ago, when it was supplanted by themselves-archaic 16-bit platforms.

The games cover all levels of ambition and quality, with some titles clearly the work of first-time programmers reconnecting with their childhood computer, and others from experienced professionals, pushing the little black box to its absolute limits. A wide breath of creativity, in other words, with a lot of it passing by unheralded.

So on one hand, the Why is to recognise and celebrate this output. But on the other hand, just as some of us dreamed of getting rich making Spectrum games, some of us loved the magazine culture surrounding the games themselves - Crash, Your Sinclair, Sinclair User and the rest. And here we are, reconnecting with that idea as best we can. Much like the hobbyist game authors, we're learning as we go. Bear with us.

So, finally. What is this?

This is a magazine that aims to celebrate all new game releases for the Sinclair ZX Spectrum.

This is Break Space.

Enjoy!

Mpk

Review Policy

As outlined just over there in the other box to the left, what we're about here is relentlessly positive. We cover each game on its own merits, and look for the upsides.

The majority of the games here are hobby projects produced for love of the process, and not for any profit other than personal satisfaction. It would not be fair or useful to review such projects harshly. There is little value in a buyers guide for free games, and while some games are available for purchase, there is little correlation between quality and price.

Each game will be reviewed by at least 2 reviewers, and given a fair assessment in its own context.

We will not be scoring games, but we will grant the coveted Break Space ACE award to the most deserving titles.

Break
Space
ACE

Phwoar, eh? Tidy.

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All New Review Crew

Clearly, you can't have a fresh and hip review magazine without a bunch of fresh(ish) hip (replacement) reviewers! So it's time to meet our 5-Star team. Bask in their glory. Bask, I say!

Dave's love of the Speccy started in the late 80's, stopped when computers turned into beige towers, and resumed in 2011 after he watched MicroMen on the telly. He dabbles in all sorts: assembly, bit of BASIC, graphics, game dev, reviews, hacking, CSSCGC host 2013, ZXDB preservation work. Only musical ability and hardware nous are totally missing from his skillset.

Favourite Speccy game from 2024 : Pacman RX

Andy teaches music, music technology and A.I. shenanigans but secretly makes art (sometimes under the name uglifruit) and wishes it was still 1983 - when he upgraded from his ZX81 to a Speccy. He's authored some software, dabbled in assembly, written reviews for crap games and made some music with the bleepy beast.

Favourite Speccy game of 2024 : Scramble RX

Pretty-boy **Jamie** is most famous for declaring, "You just know crap when you see it" on Canadian radio while hosting CSSCGC2023. Back in 1989, he begged his parents for a Spectrum +2A, choosing it solely because it looked cooler than the rest—and has been obsessed ever since. He's also made a couple of games under the handle 'jbizzel,' and yes, before you ask: He's the guy behind the 5th-best text adventure to come out in 2022 for the ZX Spectrum. Wow.
Favourite Speccy game of 2024 : Donkey Kong

Another Dave, who we call **Sloany** to differentiate him from the many other Daves of this world. He was given a Spectrum 48k for Christmas 1983 and immediately fell in love with it. This affection has only grown in the intervening 4 decades. He's rattled out a few MPAGD fueled games with his son, including the **AWARD WINNING** *Jet Set Steamboat Willie* and loves seeing the new games that folk are coming out with on Sir Clive's rubber keyed marvel.

Favourite Speccy game of 2024 : Gilligan's Mine

A whimsical fellow, **AL** is the short-named Spectrum games fan and 'brains' behind blog site ZX SPECTRUM-IT LIVES!!! which has been merrily ticking over for about two years now, occasionally achieving minor notoriety. He's produced 4 PDF books featuring content from the site and is now raring to check out the newest offerings our heroic little machine can throw at us.

Favourite Speccy game of 2024 : Escape From Happy Hills: Parrish Origins.

And then there's **Mpk**, the mean old Editor. He's just zis guy, you know?

Favoutite Speccy game of 2024 : Hafoc Tor

Crazy Burger

Menyiques, Jarlaxe, Koc
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44158/
PWYW / $2

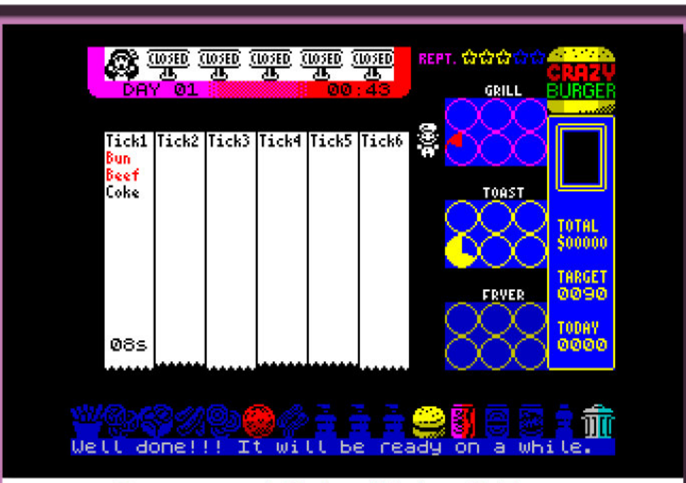
Jamie‘s Review

This week, fading pop star Katy Perry told the world she was putting the *'ass' into astronaut* when she joined an all-women 'crew' of millionaires on an 11-minute joyride to space. The news reached me as I stood in my kitchen, sorting my rubbish into neat piles of recyclables and wondering how far the nearest Tetra Pak drop-off point was. (Apparently, crumpets come in a special type of plastic that my local council can't process.)

Upon hearing about Katy's successful mission, my heart sank. I used to dream of being an astronaut. Spaceflight was supposed to be for all of mankind—not just a privileged few. Now, space is just for the rich. I must set my sights on humbler aspirations.

Which brings me neatly to my next review: Crazy Burger—a game for those who know their place in the oligarchy and have accepted it. Forget dreams of spaceflight; grab a spatula and start flipping burgers. It's time to cater to an endless procession of thankless customers, whose long lists of demands contrast sharply with the shortness of their patience.

Crazy Burger is no joke—it has all the anxiety-inducing stress of a real second job. It's a thankless world. At the end of my second day, I was fired. No explanation. I thought I'd done pretty well—I'd served two customers and finally got the hang of the gameplay. But no. Fired. The worst part? The owner made me work late serving the last customer… *and then fired me!*



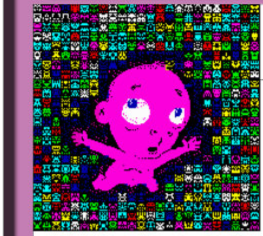
Well done!!! It will be ready on a while.

Burger and Coke, Ma'am? Easy.

Crazy Burger is excellently executed, with so many nice touches: a winking chef on the menu page, smooth full-screen transitions between scenes, charming and well-animated sprites, and no flicker. The game was made with Boriel's ZX Basic, a compiled BASIC that's easy to get started with, and this game proves Boriel can produce slick, novel, and highly enjoyable games.

Another nice touch is the manual, which explains how to play. I needed it. Even though the game is fairly simple (cook burgers, serve customers, use QAOP + SPACE to flip), my first few attempts left me clueless. After reading the manual, the penny dropped: *You have to speak to the customer to get their order*—of course!

Final thoughts: While *Crazy Burger* won't launch you into orbit like Katy Perry's vanity space trip, it does something far more grounded—and honest. Instead of selling dreams of the stars to the highest bidder, it hands you a spatula and says, *"This is your reality now."* And honestly? Flipping pixelated burgers in a thankless grind feels more authentic than watching millionaires play astronaut. *Crazy Burger* may not reach the cosmos, but it's a stellar showcase of what Boriel's engine can do—proving that real brilliance doesn't need a rocket.

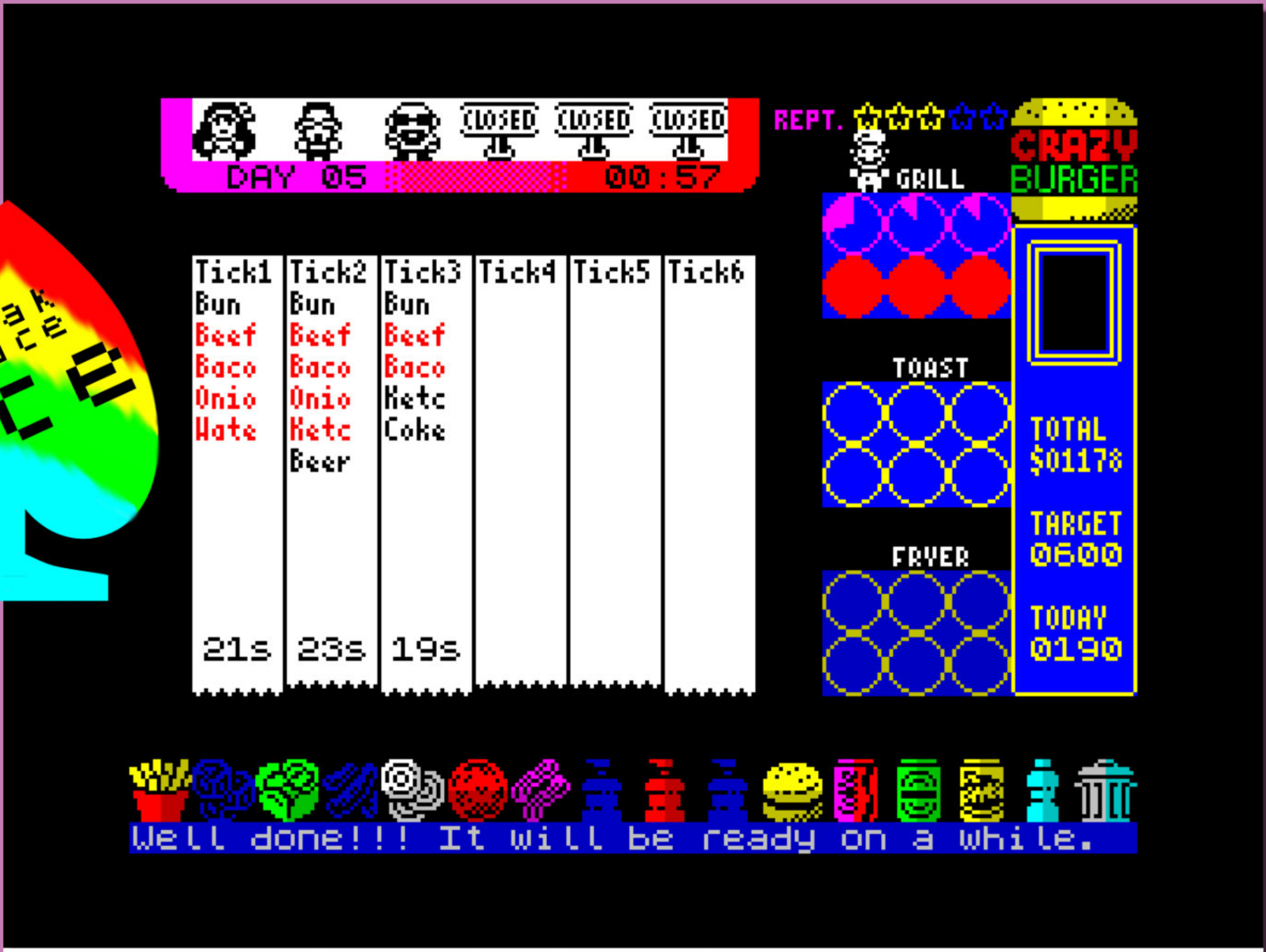


Dave‘s Comment

I never understood why kitchen staff brag about spitting in awkward customers' food—until now. Crazy Burger is aptly named, not for the faint-hearted and it'll leave you feeling as frazzled as the bacon. Games of 'plate spinner' genre are intrinsically nerve-wracking, so the play needs to balance fun & variety against stress & repetition. Menyiques has managed this perfectly.

The user-interface is one of the best I've seen. It's got so much information all delivered in Jarlaxe's delicious graphics. And it's all part of the game—choosing whether to take the short way round to get the ruddy-faced customer his onions, or the long way round putting a couple of buns in the toaster ready for the next lot of ingrates. It does a good job of easing us in, unlocking ingredients, and ramping up the pressure. Even still, it's very easy to get behind, pick up the wrong item and have to bin it, leave customers hanging, burn something—all of which gets you fired.

Alas, even when you do manage to unlock all


DAY 05
00:57
CLOSED
CLOSED
CLOSED
REPT.
GRILL
CRAZY BURGER
Tick1
Bun
Beef
Baco
Onio
Wate
21s
Tick2
Bun
Beef
Baco
Onio
Ketc
Beer
23s
Tick3
Bun
Beef
Baco
Ketc
Coke
19s
Tick4
Tick5
Tick6
TOAST
FRYER
TOTAL
$01178
TARGET
0600
TODAY
0190

Well done!!! It will be ready on a while.

Triple beef and bacon? 3 different drinks? Might as well just quit now.

Mpk‘s Comment

My favourite videogame boss was the guy in Zookeeper DX, who berates your poor performance mercilessly. Even when you thought you were doing well, he’d hit you with ‘You are barely forgiven’ or somesuch. By the time I’d gotten good and he announced that ‘You are a legend in this zoo!’, I was fair brimming with pride.

But this pizza-box-looking so-and-so? Man, he’s got nothing but bad news.

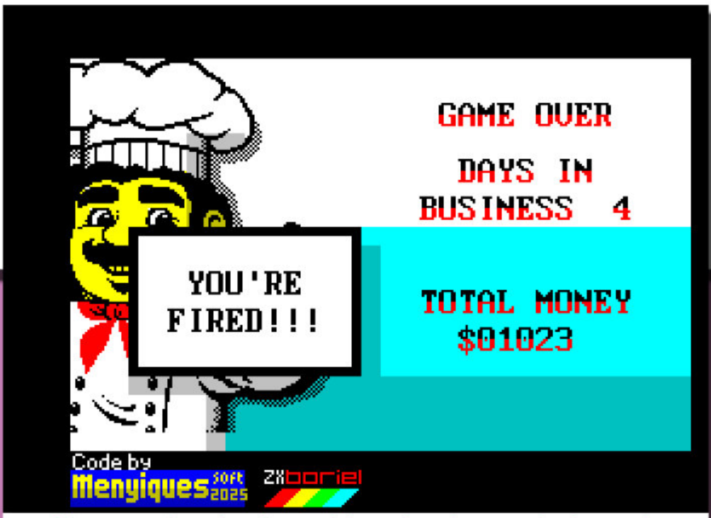
I took a while to warm up to this one, honestly. Even allowing for the classic Mpk move of not reading the manual and thus not realising that you can pick up multiples of each item at once, it just seems super difficult. Actually, it’s more that it ramps up super fast - the initial two days are pretty easy, but when you get extra parallel customers as well as new ingredients it gets a bit Kitchen Nightmares before you can say ‘Idiot Sandwich’.

But stressful as it is, it’s fun and requires a level of brow-furrowing concentration that you won’t get elsewhere. It looks good, the sound is simple but functional and the overall package comes together very nicely.

Bottom line : Should you play it? Yes, Chef!

the ingredients (you’ll want the gherkin power up more than the Laser Force in R-Type), your kitchen is doomed to go bankrupt eventually. But the game is highly replayable because there’s seemingly no end to how much you can refine and improve.

This game is quite simply an absolute triumph for the Menyiques Soft team & Boriel BASIC.



GAME OVER

DAYS IN
BUSINESS 4

YOU'RE
FIRED!!!

TOTAL MONEY
$01023

Code by
Menyiques Soft 2025
ZXboriel

No need to look so bloody pleased about it

Dodge City

J. Morris
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/43977
Free

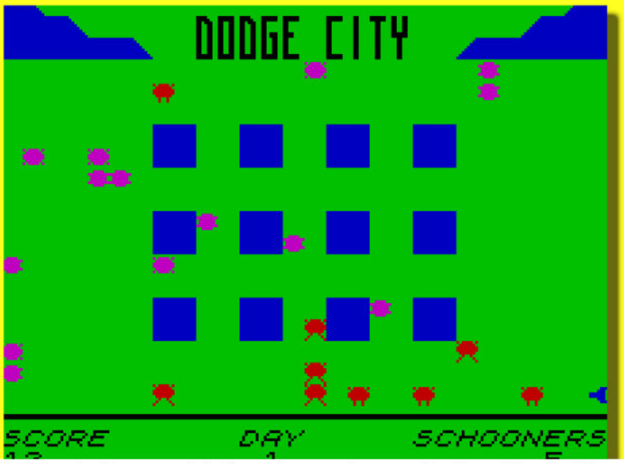
AL's Review

I'm a cowboy... on a Steel horse I ride...I'm wanted.... dead or aliIIIIlive... Well howdy good folks, didn't see ya there. Just singin' one of my favourite li'l cowboy ditties back there, while I eat my beans round the camp fire and talk toot to my old dog Bessie. It's mighty handy you happened across me though, strangers, as it gives me chance to spin y'all a yarn about my life here in Dodge City. So sit a spell and let me enlighten ya...

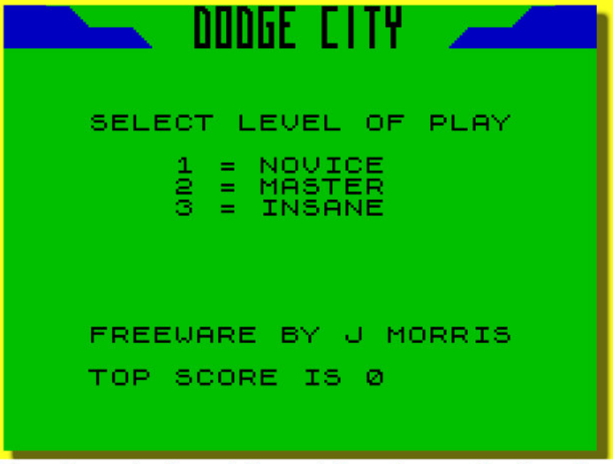
> *"It's a rootin' tootin' good time"*

I'm the sheriff of this little town, have been for many a year now. Every day I have to carry out my duties in my good oldfashioned schooner. Yeah, that's right, I got me a schooner. A strange thing for a cowboy to have you might think, especially since the nearest body of water is 150 miles away from this dry old gulch. Anyways the old girl serves me well and gets me round town just dandy-like. Which is surprising really, now I come to think of it...

Y'see, the fair town of Dodge City... alright it's a city I guess..has lately been overrun by these here Morg things... strange red creatures that look a lot like them alieeeens they got in neighbouring Roswell. I gots to shoot them critters down before they really run amok. I also like to shoot pesky pink tumbleweeds to wile away all those lonely hours I got ever since my last wife left me, but thats a whole other story for another time. Maybe the sequel. Sometimes I make life harder for myself and drink a few shots of rye before I go cruising in my schooner, kinda raising the difficulty level for myself if you will. Tends to make for a more playable... I mean exciting.. experience. Them days can get a little samey though, but I do enjoy the shootin' life nevertheless, it's a whole heap of rootin' tootin' fun for a cowboy stereotype like me. Anyways, my work's done for the day, so it's off to the Boriel Basic Bar for me, time to get well and truly redefined off of my head. Y'all come back this way sometime, y'hear..."



That's me in the corner. That's me in my schooner, shooting all the baddies.



DODGE CITY

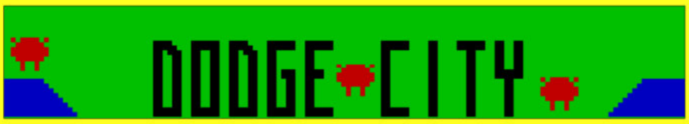
SELECT LEVEL OF PLAY

1 = NOVICE
2 = MASTER
3 = INSANE

FREEWARE BY J MORRIS

TOP SCORE IS 0

Pop it up to level 3 and it gets pretty frantic



Comments

Hmm. The thing is, other than the title, and arguably the tumbleweed, there's nothing Western themed about Dodge City at all. But don't tell Al, he's having a great time up there.

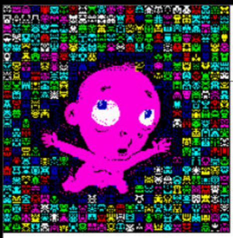
And why not - Dodge City is a smooth, playable but rather basic single-screen shooter. The red alien guys slowly move towards you, with reinforcements coming from the north occasionally. You can zip around all over the screen in your little 'schooner' firing away at will and once you've shot all the aliens, you move on to the next day.

Each day, though, is the same as the last, with no appreciable change in difficulty. Add in a few more enemy types and behaviours here, and you'd have a nifty little shooter. But without a little more challenge, it all gets repetitive very quickly. Still, as an initial release from a new author, it's a solid base on which to improve.

Pass the rye, Al, lets make this interesting

Speccy

Alex Cooper
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44024
PWYW / £2

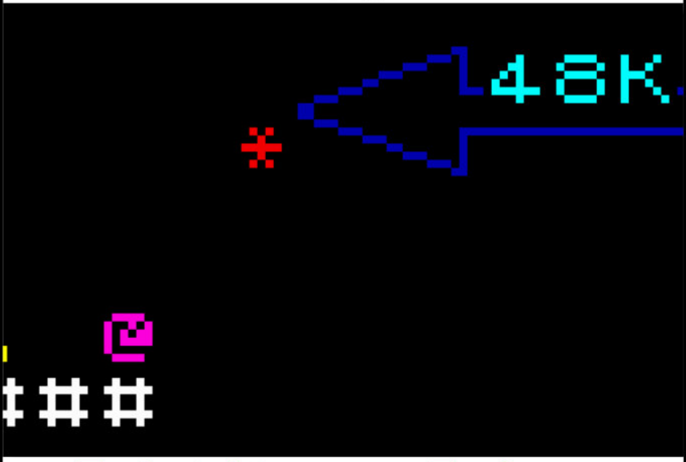


Dave's Review

I nearly fell off my chair when I saw 'Speccy' announced on Planeta Sinclair's website: "*Here is the first game created from scratch with The Spectrum*". It set my mind racing. How did we know? How was it recovered from 1982? How was it verified (and I don't mean VERIFYd)? Why doesn't it look like a 2p type-in? It transpired that the claim is actually to be the first game written on and for newly released 'The Spectrum' console from Retro Games Ltd, and that might well be true.

Speccy is also Alex Cooper's first game release. His aim was to make a platform game in BASIC, shunning UDGs in favour of ASCII. Thankfully his aim was true and with liberal use of colour and some excellent line DRAWings it avoids the risk of 'naff' and hits the bullseye of 'charming'.

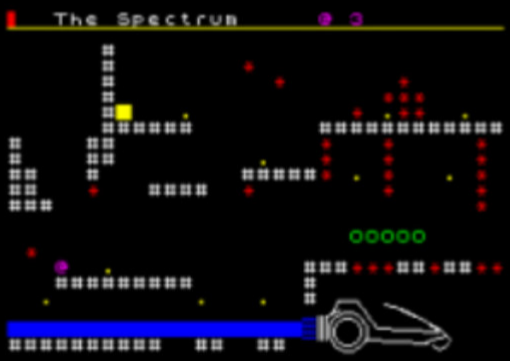
It's the well-worn but incredibly durable platforming drill: guide 'Speccy' (magenta ampersand), collect the coins (yellow full stops), avoid the nasties (red asterisks), flip the odd lever (red backslash), and get to the exit – in this case the Sacred Four colours of the ZX-Spectrum: red, yellow, green and blue. Complete all four levels and 'buy' the colours, and you'll get a much coveted The Spectrum. Well I'm on board – I've been on back-order with HMV for bloody ages now!



The best pictures are on The Speccy.

Given that it's BASIC, and there's a few things happening on the screen, you'll know what to expect: some clunky physics and the occasional unresponsive keypress, but it plays pretty well.

We've all been stung by BASIC howlers in the past and this is not one of them. The author is very open on how he coded it, but has chosen to include a machine code anti-BREAK routine, so you'll need to know a few tricks if you want to read the listing (or just use BASin!).



The C5+++ never made it to market fortunately

I've never had the patience to create anything meaningful using PLOT, CIRCLE and DRAW, but I'm glad Alex did. They may add a bit of time to the screen render, but seeing a C5 with a deadly plasma exhaust makes it worth the wait. It's proof that the best pictures are not on the radio, but on the ZX-Spectrum, because, well—it's got the best pictures.

There are two modes of play: easy and 'not'. Start with easy to get a feel for it, and realise that it's not a walk in the park. It's worth playing in both modes as each has a different ending –complete it on easy and you'll receive a put-down that'll make you feel like a dog; complete it on hard and you'll get a screen display worthy of a God. There's only four levels—can't be that hard, can it? *I think I'll check the HMV lead-time...*

> ***"a C5 with a deadly plasma exhaust makes it worth the wait"***

Mpk's Comment

This is by Alex Cooper? Wow. Even aging glam rockers are making Spectrum games these days, it seems. And fair play to the panda-eyed codger…wait, I'm just getting an update. Alice? Really? No wonder he was so mad.

Anyway, although marginally less impressive now that it's not written by a 70's rock star, Speccy does as well as it could be expected to in BASIC. It's a little clunky, sure, but colourful and consistent. It's also very, very difficult in places.

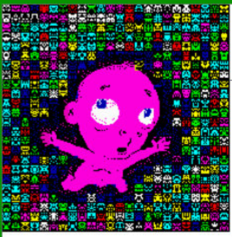
If nothing else, this serves to highlight the power of the various development tools available to your modern developer. A short time working with tools like MPAGD or ZXGM on a PC will get you a slick Spectrum platformer light years away from what a beginner could expect to do on real hardware (or The Spectrum) in a similar time, all without writing a lick of Spectrum code.

So : congratulations are due to Alex on being the first to publish a game written on the The Spectrum, with all its rubber-key encumberances. Now if he can just team up with Jake 'The Snake' Roberts at Wrestlemania, we'd have a real star on our hands.

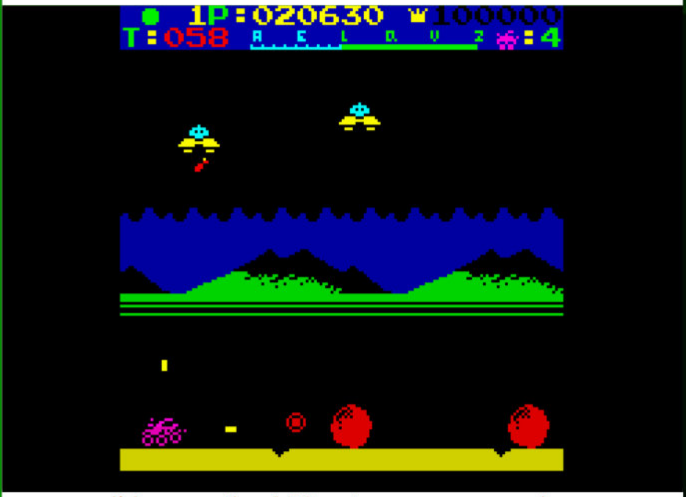
Lunar Patrol

Gabriele Amore, with Lee Bee, Goodboy
& Isaias Diaz Toledano
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44036
Free

Dave's Review



Gabriele Amore is a creative free spirit with an obstinate refusal to use MPAGD the way it was intended*. Due to this, his softography is dominated by the flamboyant & experimental. That's why I'm surprised his Lunar Patrol is so faithful to the arcade game it's inspired by.



I'd swear the A59 gets worse every day

Having scrolling craters to jump is the minimum requirement to get into the 'Moon Patrol' group in ZXDB. Lunar Patrol of course has that, but also: 3 layer scrolling, 3 types of UFO – including the crater making bombers, mines, bumps, boulders, planty aliens in holes, rear ambushers, beginner & expert courses, an attract mode, an A-Z with checkpoints, a hazard indicator light (sort of), bonuses, a hillscape and a space cityscape, the arcade music.. and breathe. In fact it would be easier to say what's missing, which is the sloped hill sections – something that none of the speccy ports have anyway.

I'm no musician, but to my ear Lee Bee's AY rendition of the music is totally on point, as are the pings and ditties when you start and finish a section. Hats off for mingling that with AY spot FX too, so you can enjoy the tune without the pings and explosions interrupting it.

GabAm is clear that this is not an attempt to make Moon Patrol RX (though it is the closest thing we have until highrise does it). Even though large parts of it look 'serious', Gab's distinctive cartoony style shines through – he couldn't do HR Giger without it looking a bit cuddly. So even though the term sells the game short, it's not inaccurate to describe it as 'cute' Moon Patrol. I think it looks all the better for it.

GabAm has released several versions on this theme, Moon Ranger in 2020 using his trademark highly coloured sprites that move in character squares, followed by Moon Ranger 2021, done with AGD mini. Both are good, and look outstanding, but they are stuttery to play. His best work is when he combines his talent for colourful graphics and frenzied gameplay with some regular smooth sprites, and that's why he's hit paydirt with Lunar Patrol where he's brought it all together.

So what's wrong with it? Unfortunately there's a bug where the game freezes on occasion. It's rare, but it's the reason I voted it an 8 not a 9 at SC. At least a fudge-fix has been included: press the R key and the game restores from the last checkpoint. A shame, but not a deal-breaker for me at least.

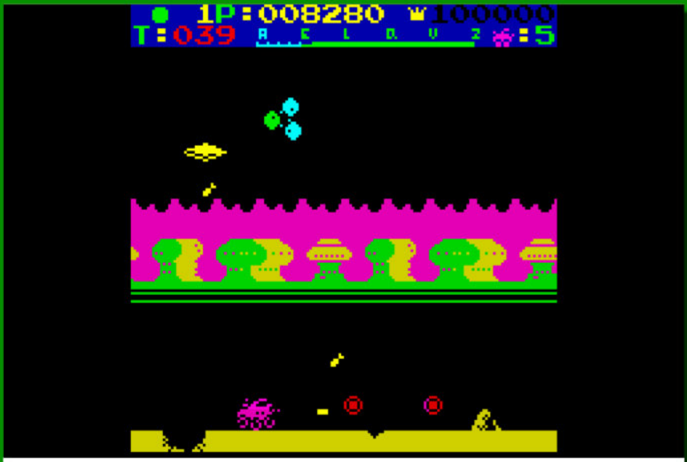
The Speccy was never blessed when it came to Moon Patrol. If you search the SC archive for games in this licence, it's a litany of howlers. With a few exceptions they range from ZX-embarrassments by software houses that should know better to BASIC clunkfests that are little more than glorified pothole surveys. So thank Gab & AGD that we have Lunar Patrol to get us out of this hitherto depressing ditch.

Andy's Comments

It'd be easy to dismiss Lunar Patrol for its minor flaws—but doing so would mean missing out on its many joys. I've encountered moments where the game rolled indefinitely with no enemies, no craters, and no way to reset—indeed, the inclusion of a 'reset' button feels like a tacit admission that things don't always work quite as intended. But perfection is the enemy of finished, and with that in mind, we have a Moon Patrol adaptation that might be slightly flawed but is wonderfully likeable.

The difficulty progression and overall feel suggest that Gabriele worked hard, pushing the limits of AGD to bring this to life. The polish—great graphics, music, checkpoints, a loading screen, and an attract mode with instructions—shows the care and love poured into it. Most importantly, it nails the near-panic of trying to watch two places at once, a hallmark of a good Moon Patrol clone.

Highly recommended—even if you do need a chameleon's independent eyes to keep track of both the skies and the road ahead.



It's still preferable to the M25

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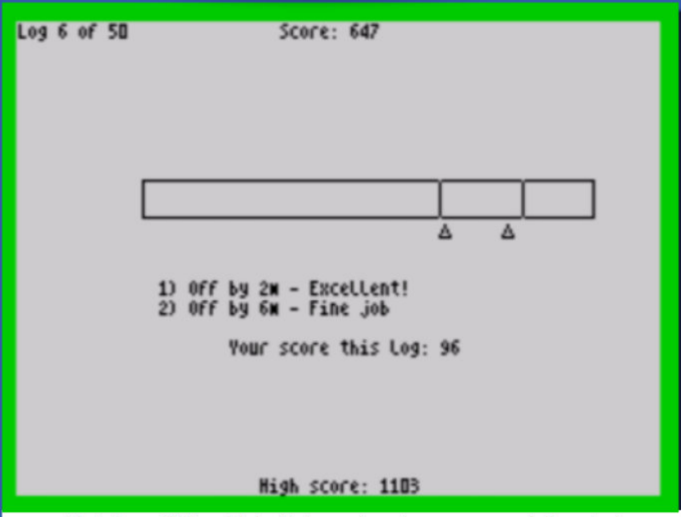
*which I reckon is exactly the way Jonathan Cauldwell wants some people to use it.

ZX Log Chopper

Derek Fountain

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44007

Free



```
Log 6 of 50              Score: 647

1) Off by 2m - Excellent!
2) Off by 6m - Fine job

     Your score this Log: 96

        High score: 1103
```

Not since Gillian Mckeith have logs been so carefully rated

Andy's Review

Chopping Logs: on telly it looks the epitome of manliness, and quite mindful I reckon. And I think I'd be pretty good at - lumberjack shirt, axe across my shoulder, living off the land, fighting off grizzlies with my bare hands and chopping logs for my stove in cabin, all whilst whistling beautifully. I can picture it now.

> "The epitome of masculinity"

Derek Fountain has managed to take this most serene and wholesome of activities, and made it horribly frenzied and stressful. And he's done it all using one key on the Speccy. Appropriate for something set in the great-outdoors, 'Space' is the key in question. You can probably guess what you do from the screen shot – press space when the rapidly moving line (presumably the axe) aligns with the arrows. Fail to make your cuts close enough to the designated points and you're sacked. There's no formal disciplinary or warnings in lumberjackery, it's one ruined log and back to the job queue. Continue as the number of required cuts increases, the pace of the line movement increases, the size of the log changes. Well, continue until you fail; or cut all 50 logs. Get a high score, take a screenshot, boast about it on social media (I assume).

Written as an exercise in using the Z88DK 'classic' library, ZX Log Chopper – as slight as it is – is reasonably slick insofar as it uses the nice little font, and there are sound effects (thought they are all a bit laser-y, again taking away from the serenity of the job you're tasked with, and suggesting a dystopian future rather than rural idyll). Actually trying to beat a previous score is quite compelling, and given the simplicity, it's very easy to have just-have-one-more go.

There is no real front end to speak of; no loading screen, no backstory, no unnecessary fluff, just a one button game to test your reflexes. If you're playing on a ZX Spectrum in 2025 the chances are your reflexes are not what they once were, and this'll remind you of that.

Maybe it's time to take a walk outside in the woods.

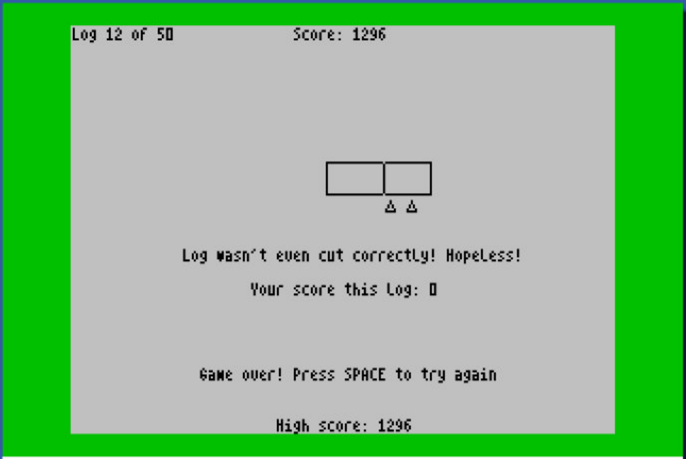
Mpk's Comment

I have a fancy keyboard on my PC. For gamers. It has lights on it and the best switches and cost more than I care to recall. It's served me well for modern games, online and otherwise, and I do alright with it, considering the failing reflexes which Andy suggests and which I cannot deny.

However, it is not up to the challenge of ZX Log Chopper.

When the speed ramps up, and there are 3+ chops to be made in a tight cluster, I repeatedly find myself blaming my failures on the travel distance of my space bar. Could the peak of modern engineering really not be responsive enough for this primordially simple Spectrum game? Apparently so. I feel like this absurd epiphany has cost me part of my sanity.

I can't bear a grudge against the game though : ZX Log Chopper is simple and quick enough that I find myself reloading it when I have a minute to spare. It doesn't do much, but it does it very well.



```
Log 12 of 50             Score: 1296

 Log wasn't even cut correctly! Hopeless!

         Your score this Log: 0

     Game over! Press SPACE to try again

            High score: 1296
```

Stupid keyboard

MoonRn

Snauts
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44037
Free

Mpk's Review

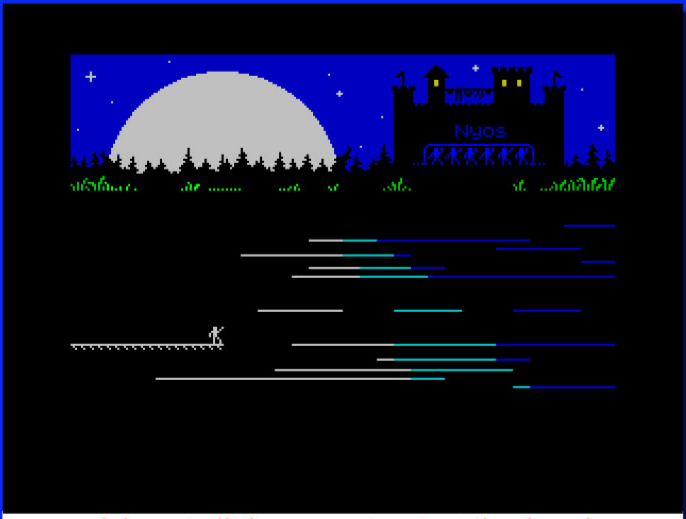
You know what's great? Skipping stones across a lake. I don't care who you are - you'll not beat the satisfaction of getting a bunch of little hops out of your carefully selected stone. Flat, but not too flat. Not too light, fits nicely in the curve of your index. Swing back, whip it aaaand SKIP...
SKIP.. Skip..SkipSKip skipskipskiskip. Plop.
Awesome.
But - that record breaking stone? That perfect selection that just drew a gasp from some gawking kid? It's at the bottom of a lake now, you idiot. You threw it away! So it is with video games.
You look for a good one, try a few duds - and every now and then there it is. The skipper. So you play it and love it and then it's done. All that's left is to write a little review with a laboured intro and move along.

> ***"you'll need to get your timing just right"***

MOONRN, you see, is a game about skipping across a lake. Or, more accurately, about skipping lightly across moonbeams as they sparkle on a lake. It's also Moon Run spelt wrong, you see. Set in the kingdom of Mondlauf (Moon Run in German, monoglots) on a magical night when the moon's rays solidify the water just enough that a brave and nimble person can skip across the water. It's not easy, oh no, but there's a marvellous prize awaiting, so off you go.

The game is a not-quite-endless runner game with a single button to jump. And, as you'll need to figure out pretty quickly, double-jump. The moon illuminates patches of water that you can run on, and you'll need to get your timing just right to move between them. The levels are short, and with just 20 of 'em it's not a long game as such, but you will need quite a bit of practice to get through. You start with an infinite-lives practice mode available, as well as the regular 5-lives mode. Beat that, and you'll unlock a mode where you only get one life. Beat that and...well, let me know if you manage it.

This is the 4th games from relative newcomer Snauts, who excels in making simple games look great. The game uses a small colour pallette to pick out the moonlight platforms, which zip along at different speeds, while the simple stick figure has an impressively characterful gait. Movement is super-smooth, and the control super-responsive, as it needs to be. It sounds great too, on 128k machines at least, with a classy up-tempo tune to encourage you to keep your socks dry.


A jaunty little wave to start the level

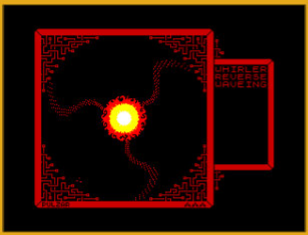
What's most impressive though, is the design of those few levels. There's a real progression in difficulty, but each has a clear identity, its own gimmick that you need to get to grips with. Not a jump is wasted, and it delivers a superbly economical gameplay experience.

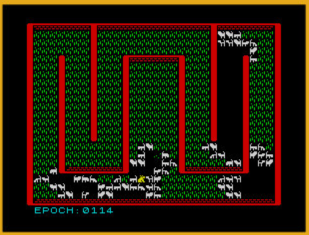
A cracking start to 2025 and one that, unlike your favourite stone, you'll be able to rediscover afresh every now and again.

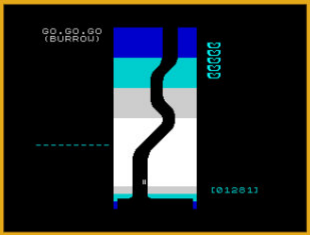
Prior Art

Snauts burst onto the scene in 2024 with no less than 3 titles, each presenting straight-forward arcade titles with a strong visual style.

Of those, the standout is probably Pulzar, a high-octane bullet-hell survival game. Grazers is an interesting action update to the Horizons tape Foxes & Rabbits, and Zlalox is a challenging overhead skiing game.





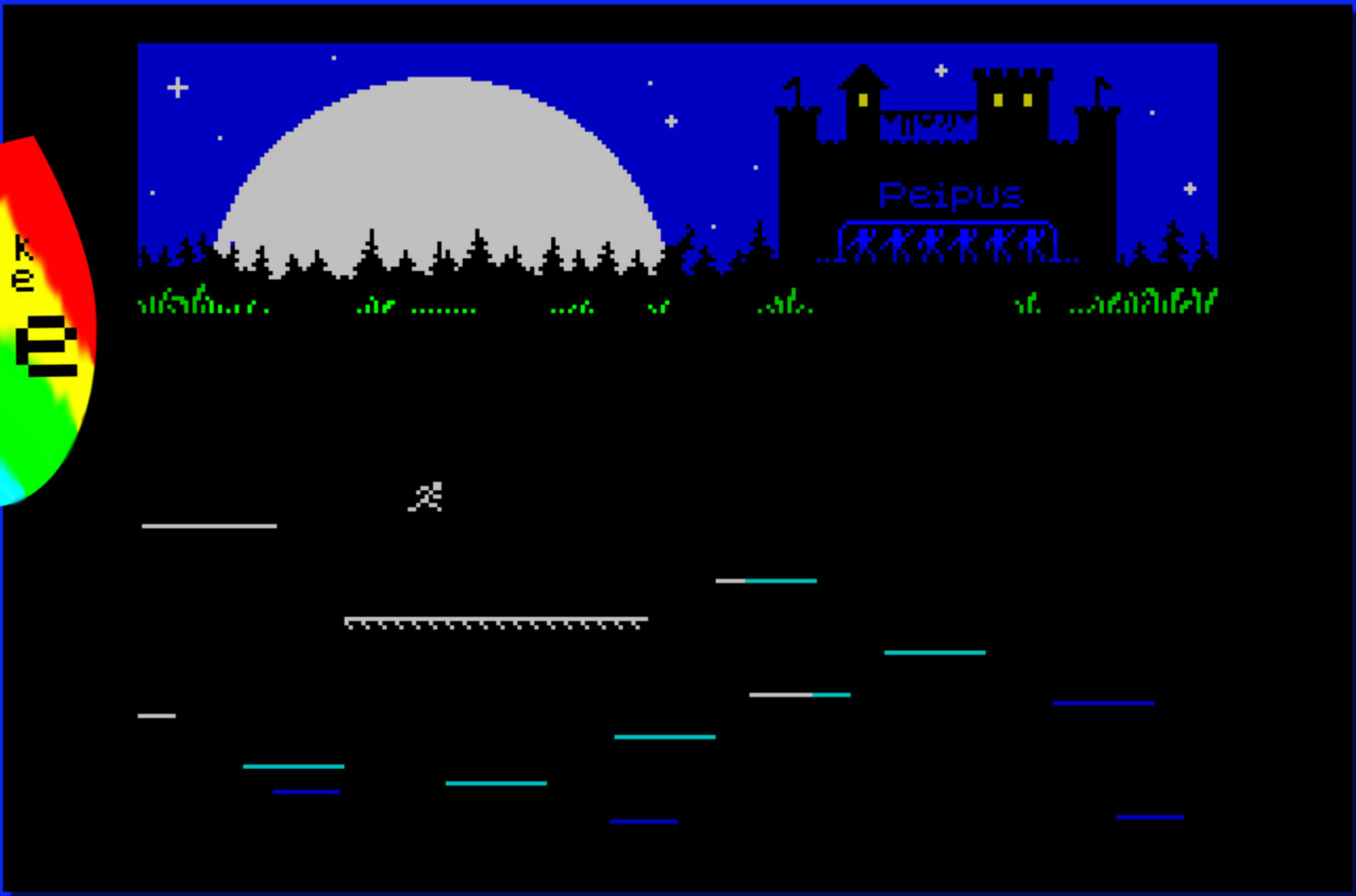


Al’s Comment

"Moonrunning... deserves a quiet night" as some bald guy once sang. Shame that's not the in-game tune, but the AY music there is, is pretty darn good, so we'll let them off.

This is a fun little jaunt which I have to admit I got stuck on first time round before I accidentally discovered the joys of double-jumping. Once I'd cracked that, my guy was boinging around like Mario on crack, banging his head on stuff and regularly drowning, but never letting it get to him.

Moonrn (couldn't they afford the missing 'U'?) Is very simple and very effective. And most importantly it's proper addictive. I happily completed it using the initial infy lives facility, only to be told to try again, but as Mpk has mentioned, with a somewhat harder difficulty level. I think I lack the talent to accept THAT task...



Moondance? Marvellous night for it, I’m sure.

Dave’s Comment

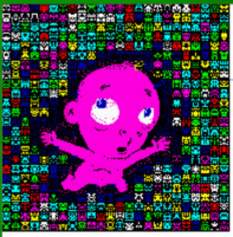
I do like Snauts’ games; they’re a fresh take on an idea, and the action ones can all be characterised by an atmospheric, clean look & smooth gameplay. 50 frames per second to be precise, which is as smooth and fast as the eye can see on a Speccy. And I wonder if it’s the striving for 50fps that actually inspired MoonRN. It can be hard to make a game run this fast, especially when scrolling large areas of the screen. However, you can scroll lots of spaced out lines more easily, and I wonder if this gave rise to the idea of ‘solidified rays of light’. I’d love to know, but we’re not allowed to ask creators “where do you get your ideas from?” apparently.

Anyway, whether it was the code inspiring the art, the art necessitating the code, or moonshine inspiring the coder doesn’t matter – it’s a quirky, fun, well-made runner game. Snauts understands what modern audiences like: a practice mode, bite-sized stages and easy to pick up & play. I’ve seen enough of their games to get a little prickle of excitement when I see a new release – so please keep scratching that itch, Snauts. *(Eww! - Ed)*

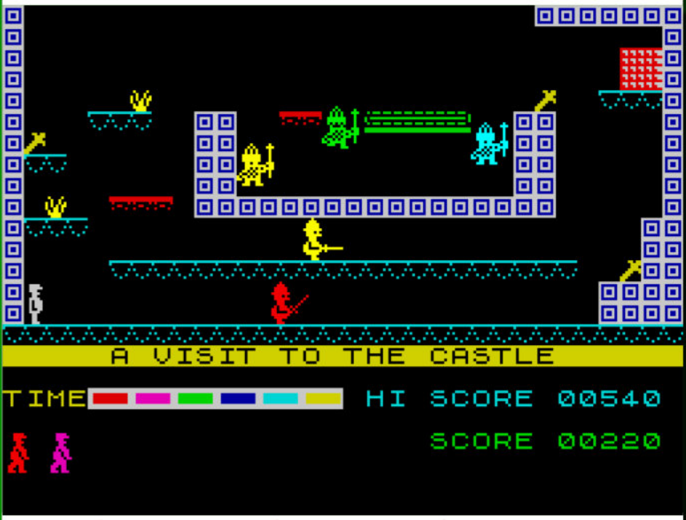
Frantic Day

John Weatherly
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/24902
Free

Review



Okay, bottom line up front, or 'BLUF' if you want a modicum of brevity: this game is a Manic Miner inspired platform game recovered from the late eighties. It features alliteration, crumbling platforms, collectables, falling too far, waggling feet while jumping, animated lives, a time bar, a 'Vat', a flashing exit, and most importantly – toilets. It doesn't make a secret of its influences: Matt Smith is even referenced on a Eugene-esque level (but will 'Eugene' do what you expect?) There may also be hints of Sir Lancelot & Brian Bloodaxe in there too. If that's not your cup of tea then go away and have a ruddy good word with yourself.



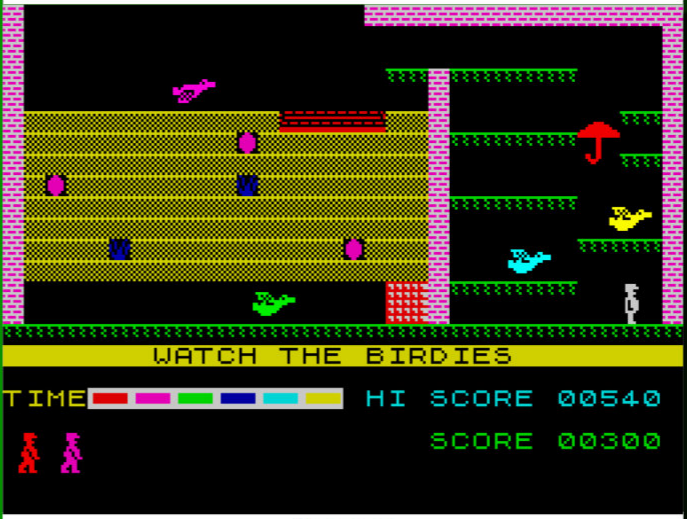
Wish I'd joined the RSPB instead of the National Trust

Frantic Day, or 'Fred and his frantic day' as the game's intro screen calls it, was originally released on a 'Your Computer' compilation in 1986. We've known about a Spanish translation released with a different magazine, but the original English version has been MIA until the author, John Weatherby, recovered it in early January. It's fantastic to think that software is still being unearthed from attics (and it is mostly attics; sometimes it's lofts) after all this time, intact enough to digitise. Long may it continue. Fred's Frantic day starts, as some of the best days do, with waking up. After breakfast and a quick tidy of the garage, he pops out to the garden, the arcade, a visit to a castle and rounds it off with putting the bins out. That more or less sums up what everyone with a National Trust sticker in their hatchback gets up to on a bank holiday, only with more demonically possessed household items running amok.

It's a treat to play - pure oldschool. That's no surprise because it IS oldschool, but it looks and feels more '83 than '86. I'm willing to be proved wrong, but I don't think you could quite reproduce the spirit of such a game these days even if you tried.

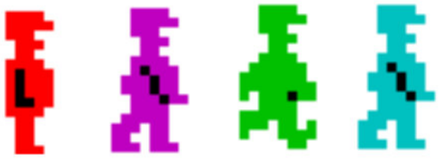
The 128K Spectrum was unleashed in Jan 1986, so it's possible that AY was becoming familiar when this game was being developed. However, the thought of an AY track here is as incongruous as playing The Aphex Twin on a gramophone (though that doesn't mean I don't want to hear it). The in-game beeper music is more fitting with the genre. Yes it's a concatenation of short trills, but that's all it can be without interfering with the program. Turn it off if it bothers you.

Frantic Day isn't that frantic per se, but it is very hard. On your first try you're unlikely to pass more than a couple of obstacles let alone finish a screen. The defining factor here is the jump - it's the old diagonal up and down with no change in mid-air. At 9 levels it must be do-able, and I reckon BITD I'd have cracked my knuckles, drawn the curtains and hunkered down to complete it without the aid of modern crutches. But at the time of writing, I've completed it with snapshots, but can only get about halfway on bread & water. So it goes.



Bugger

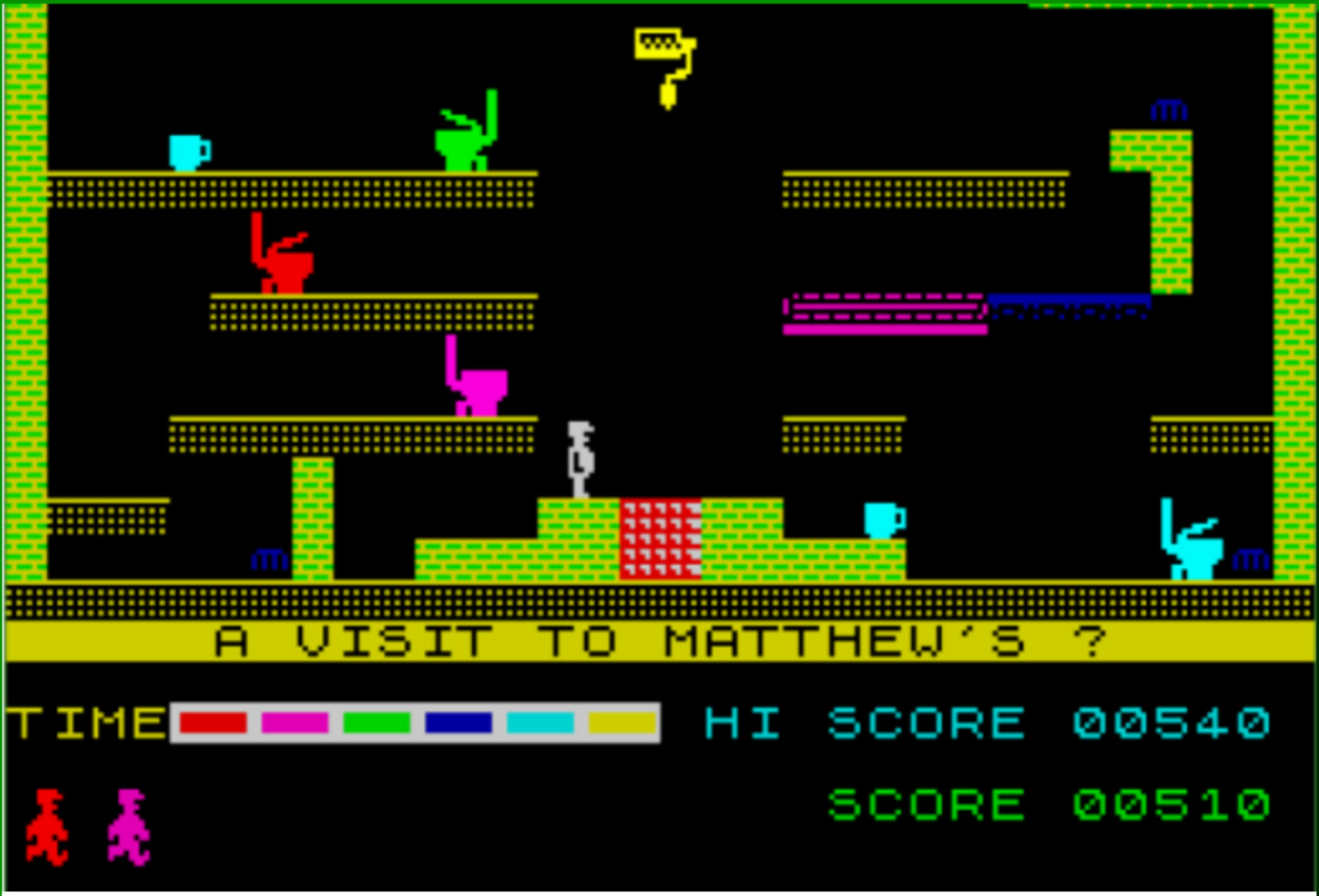
These recovered games are a fascinating window to a time gone by, but we also have the treat of the author sticking around to tell us more: John learned assembly from magazines and wrote Frantic Day with the aid of Hisoft DevPac, an Interface-1 and microdrives. That may be easier than ZEUS and cassettes, but from what I've heard about microdrives I bet it wasn't painless. John has since released a Next version of Frantic Day. Hopefully this rediscovered interest leads to new Speccy games, and maybe while going over his old notes he'll find the grail itself... the graph paper he designed the sprites on.



Mpk’s Comment

On one hand, it’s great to see an old game like this one finally get its time in the (setting) sun. On the other, this feels like a reminder that games were often real hard back then. This falls closer to the Technician Ted side of the difficulty scale than the Manic Miner sweet spot, which is a proper culture shock nowadays.

But if you have the hankering for a tough time, the precision and timing needed here will certaintly satisfy. It could not be any more of its time - undeniably a Manic Miner knockoff, but one done with a no little care and aplomb.



Familiar, and yet not.

Jamie’s Comment

"Wakey wakey!" The first level's title announces itself like an alarm clock. It's the start of what promises to be a frantic day - and a battle cry for dormant gamers. For too long, you've slumbered in the syrupy comfort of modern AAA titles that never challenge you. It's time to remember what 80s gaming was really about: rock-hard challenges that test your skills!

Frantic Day is a brutal single-screen platformer in the vein of Manic Miner and Sir Lancelot - exactly the kind of game the ZX Spectrum excels at. And I'm absolutely loving it. Each level escalates its challenges, saving the cruelest tricks for last: Too often final jumps require pixel-perfect timing. By level two, I found myself needing near-clairvoyance, timing jumps before enemies even turned my way. Death came often - but that's what makes it so addictive.

The music? It might make your ears bleed, yet somehow its absence feels wrong when muted. But sound is secondary here. What matters is the razor-sharp gameplay, and Frantic Day delivers. The platforming is tight and responsive, while the level design shows no mercy - just like the golden age of 80s gaming. Forget the hand-holding of modern titles; give this brutal gem an hour of your time instead.

Jetpac Miner

Briefer

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44153

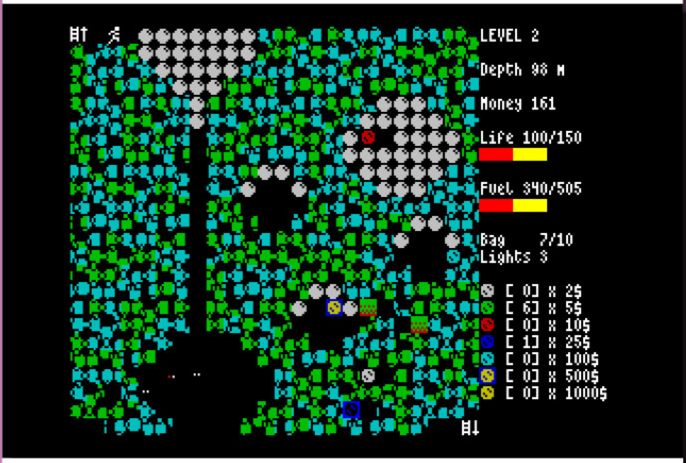
$2

Mpk‘s Review

There can’t be many titles more laser-focused on grabbing the attention of a vintage Spec-Chum. Jet Set Daley, maybe, or Chuckie Skool. Something like that.

But if the title suggests a mash-up of games, the actual play style here is about as far away from either Manic Miner or Jetpac as you could want. Think instead of modern delving games like *Splunky*, or the author-cited *A Game About Digging a Hole.*

You start at ground level, with a hole ahead of you, and a handy shop. The only way is down.



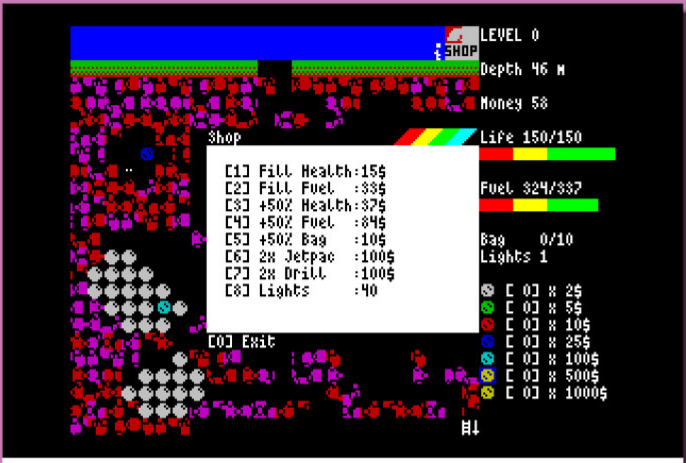
```
LEVEL 2
Depth 98 M
Money 161
Life 100/150
Fuel 340/505
Bag    7/10
Lights 3
[ 0] x 2$
[ 6] x 5$
[ 0] x 10$
[ 1] x 25$
[ 0] x 100$
[ 0] x 500$
[ 0] x 1000$
```

Hey, I wonder if that pile of rocks could be encouraged to go down that shaft…

Gameplay is straightforward - jump down that hole, and drill, baby, drill. You mine through the dirt and rather tougher rock, occasionally turning up precious stones. The rocks may fall on you, Boulder Dash style, ending your adventure very suddenly. Drilling them also uses up a lot more of your precious fuel, which not only powers your drill, but also your jetpac, which you may need to fly home if you’ve dug (or fallen down) a shaft that’s too high to jump out of.

The rocks can also be used to smash the wandering creatures that will sap your energy. Whatever those creatures are is unclear*, as they are cleverly and simply represented by pairs of flashing eyes in the dark.

That’s the gameplay loop then - dig, collect precious rocks, return to surface, sell rocks, buy improved fuel tanks and drills and so on. You can buy lights to enable travel to greater depths - a ladder icon in the bottom corner of each level takes you down to the next screen.



```
SHOP              LEVEL 0
                  Depth 46 M
                  Money 58
Shop              Life 150/150
[1] Fill Health:15$
[2] Fill Fuel  :33$   Fuel 324/337
[3] +50% Health:37$
[4] +50% Fuel  :84$
[5] +50% Bag   :10$   Bag    0/10
[6] 2x Jetpac  :100$  Lights 1
[7] 2x Drill   :100$
[8] Lights     :40    [ 0] x 2$
                      [ 0] x 5$
[0] Exit              [ 0] x 10$
                      [ 0] x 25$
                      [ 0] x 100$
                      [ 0] x 500$
                      [ 0] x 1000$
```

Weirdest grocery list ever

Returning home with a full rucksack and low fuel can be genuinely tense, and the delicacy of your drilling around rock piles encourages thoughtful, careful progress. There are flashes of humour as well, including a gag in the redefine keys option that made me hoot aloud.

It’s ambitious, with modern sensibilities, and pretty much unique as a package on the Spectrum.

But. There are technical issues here - the game crashes too frequently, the hand-built code corrupting itself and putting an end to your hard-won progress. The rocks don’t fall as predictably as they should to allow satisfying planning. The jump/jetpac controls sometimes are finnicky to operate. Sometimes individual blocks don’t render correctly. Nothing major, aside from the crashes, but collectively enough to dampen the mood.

Enough small problems in the end, to make this a near miss rather than a modern classic. But the design is fun and well worth, aha, digging into. Oh, I can’t believe I’ve said that.

Al‘s Comment

Eh? Can you do this then, without getting sued by Ultimate, Matthew Smith and Maria Whittaker (she appears on the back of the inlay, causing confusion and a little retro arousal)? It's cheeky, you've got to give them that... but can it live up to its daunting monicker?

Well of course not, but it's not half bad. Quite strategic with half an eye on grabbing booty* and half on not getting caved in and carking.

The graphics are good considering their teeny tinyness, and you can happily spelunk to the tune of "Hard Day's Night" by up and coming pop combo The Bee-atles playing merrily. Oh no, that's someone else gonna sue!

---

*Possibly it's in the manual, but manuals are for nerds, frankly.

*Tradition demands that I add an 'Oo-er' at this point, but I'm noyt happy about it. -Ed

Mr. Potato in Potatoland

Crazy Duck Games
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44030
Free

Mpk‘s Review

Mrs. Potato has been kidnapped. By a chef. This seems like both
a) terrible news for the Potato family and
b) a golden opportunity to wheel out a list of potato puns.
But fear not - I shall eschew option b. You deserve better.

This is the first game on the Speccy from Crazy Duck, who have a small portfolio of Windows and NES titles on itch.io. Mr. Potato is already available on those 2 lesser platforms, but is now elevated to the Spectrum using MPAGD. And it couldn’t really be simpler.
It’s a standard platformer, with our hero shuffling along and trying not to make contact with the baddies, in this case the evil chef’s possessed cooking hats. (Before I read the introductory text, I had them tagged as cupcakes initially, then settled on meat pies. But hats it is.)

Sometimes with a cutely themed platformer, one expects an easy ride. ‘This root vegetable couldn’t hurt me’, one thinks. One must think again. There are no margins for error in here at all, with precision timing required to progress on most screens. The over-eager collision detection doesn’t help matters. Rescuing your beloved spouse will be a challenge.
Graphically and sonically, things are a little rough around the edges. Animations are minimalist, and the sound effects are a little harsh on the ears, with no music. The redefine keys option doesn’t work right either, omitting the Up and Down controls which you’ll need to negotiate ladders.

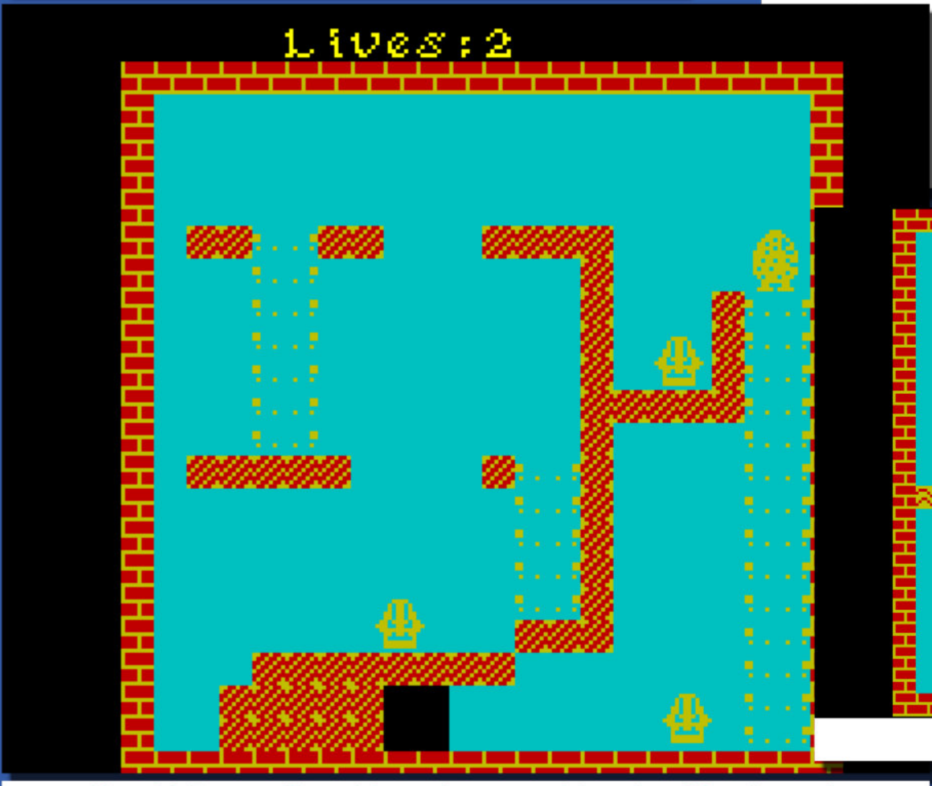
Not a Game of the Year candidate then, but a welcome first time crack at the Speccy. There’s a little crunch to it, even if you won’t quite have a Gala. Wait. That’s apples.

Al‘s Comment

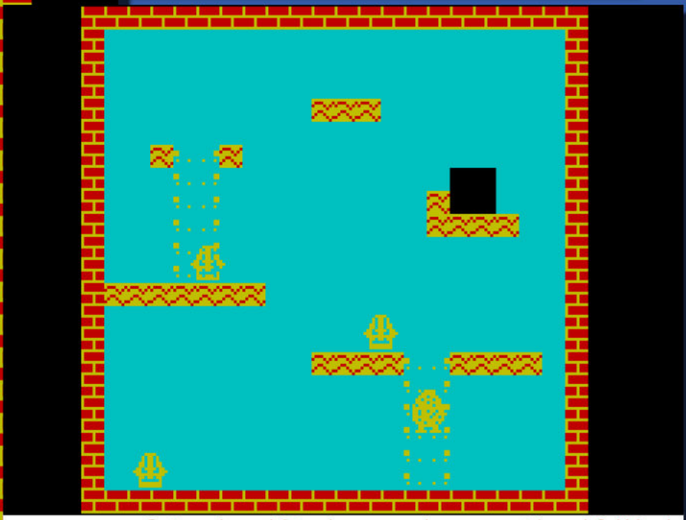
“It's your friend and mine, Meester Potato!" That Peppa Pig reference will resonate with any recent parents like myself, others will have to just sit and look confused. It's nice to see him in his own game anyway, he's a fine tuber, he really is.

Ooh dunnhe jump high for a spud?! Not many spuds can jump three times their height, so he's clearly quite the athlete. He boings his way round five screens of gentle platformery and quite comfortably meets up with Mrs Potato Head at the end. Aaahh spuddy love is forever, not just for tea-time.

The Speccy has hitherto been starved of healthy vegetable content, having only had Bobby Carrot as representation. There's been plenty of fast food and the odd fruit (in machines mostly) but I can declare this game to be safe for vegetarians. Enough potato waffle from me.



Here. Mr Potato will need the undocumented down key [S] to descend.



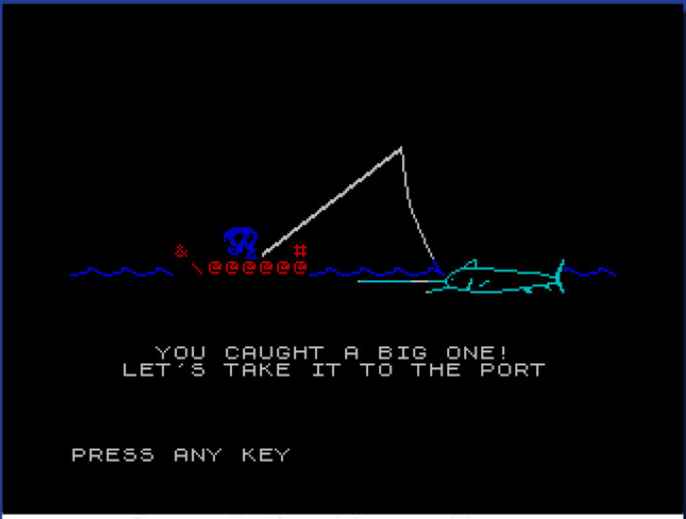
Outnumbered 3-to-1, can our brave veg triumph? (Yes)

Horace Goes Fishing

Moe, Kerl, Fransouls

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44018

Free



```
YOU CAUGHT A BIG ONE!
LET'S TAKE IT TO THE PORT

PRESS ANY KEY
```

Oo-er, that's a big one Horace.

Sloany's Review

Well, here's someone who needs no introduction to readers of this fine publication, which makes things a little difficult for someone who has to write one. Anyone who is even remotely aware of the early days of the ZX Spectrum will recognise our hero, generally from his days hitting the slopes, being peckish or hanging out with arachnids.

So, what does a semi-retired, (...what exactly was he anyway? Creature? I'll go with creature) do now he's put those days behind him? Why he buys himself a boat, heads out into the open water and does a bit of relaxing fishing.

Apparently inspired by the 1958 film 'The Old Man and the Sea', Horace Goes Fishing was written in BASIC by Moe & Kerlas for the BASIC 2025 Competition and comes in two flavours, one in Sinclair BASIC and a compiled version using Mcoder III.

Although written in BASIC, the game itself is pretty slick and much like when he first hit the slopes, Horace's adventures are split into two sections, each with its own distinctive gameplay.

The first stage sees Horace casting his rod and trying to bag himself a suitable sized catch. This is easier said than done however, as what follows is a frantic battle of man Vs machine unseen since Kyle Rees first took on the T-800. I certainly hope your O, P and A keys are up to snuff as you'll be frantically hammering them for all they are worth in order to land the little blighter. The sickener comes when you land the fish too easily, as 9 out of 10 times it'll be because it's a little tiddler and no good, meaning you have to restart the game.

I did eventually manage to land a big 'un a few times, however I only every managed this on Beginner level and only after some Herculean battles that left me drained! Trust me, 316 seconds might not seem like much, but its an eternity when you're approaching 50 and hammering those rubber keys for all they are worth.

When you do achieve a suitably sized catch, then it's on to the 2nd stage and much like Horace Goes Skiing, the second section is my favourite. Here you have to protect your big fish from the hungry sharks, hell bent on chomping your catch. This is done by waiting until your shot lines up with one of the rapidly advancing little brutes & releasing it at the appropriate time to get him right between the eyes. The more of these little gits that successfully reach your big fish, the less cash you will get at the market.

"a bit of
fish

There are 4 skill levels, although I'm sure skill levels 3 & 4 are unnecessary as I have absolutely no idea how someone can complete the first part of this game on skill level 2 or above! All in all, it is a bit of fun and has a slickness that belies its BASIC origins. It might not be an ofishial Horace game, but it's certainly worth reeling in.

Fin.

**Man, it's a book! By Hemingway, no less -Ed*

Mpk's Comment

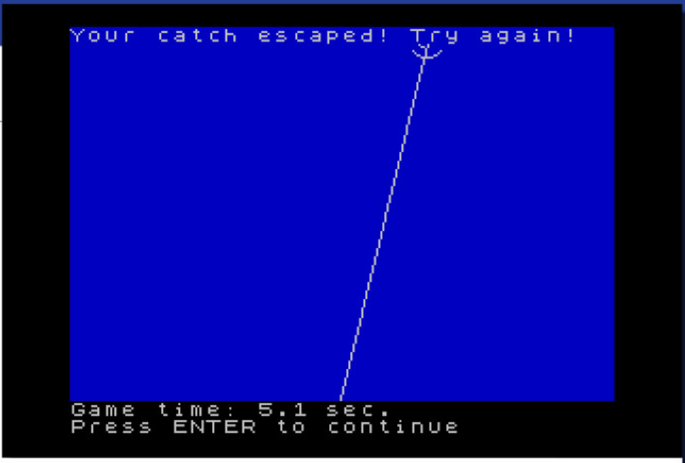
Now hold on a second. I was very disciplined about avoiding potato puns just one page back, and now I'm faced with this flurry of fish puns? For shame, Sloany. For shame.

This is not to take away from HGF, of course. Mirroring the classic Horace practice of combining 2 separate sections is a welcome move. The first section is very hard - even now that I think I've figured out how it works, it's still extremely difficult to execute. Which makes the second section even more tense, as your hard-won prize is nibbled away with each missed shot.

For all its simplicity, the game does a great job combining a strong theme with unusual mechanics.

Jamie’s Comment

I’m a big fan of fishing simulators, so I was excited to give this game a try. Despite being coded in BASIC, you’d never guess it from the level of polish and the high standard of execution. Reading about the effort the developers put into perfecting this game, it’s clear that it was a true labour of love.



```
Your catch escaped! Try again!
Game time: 5.1 sec.
Press ENTER to continue
```

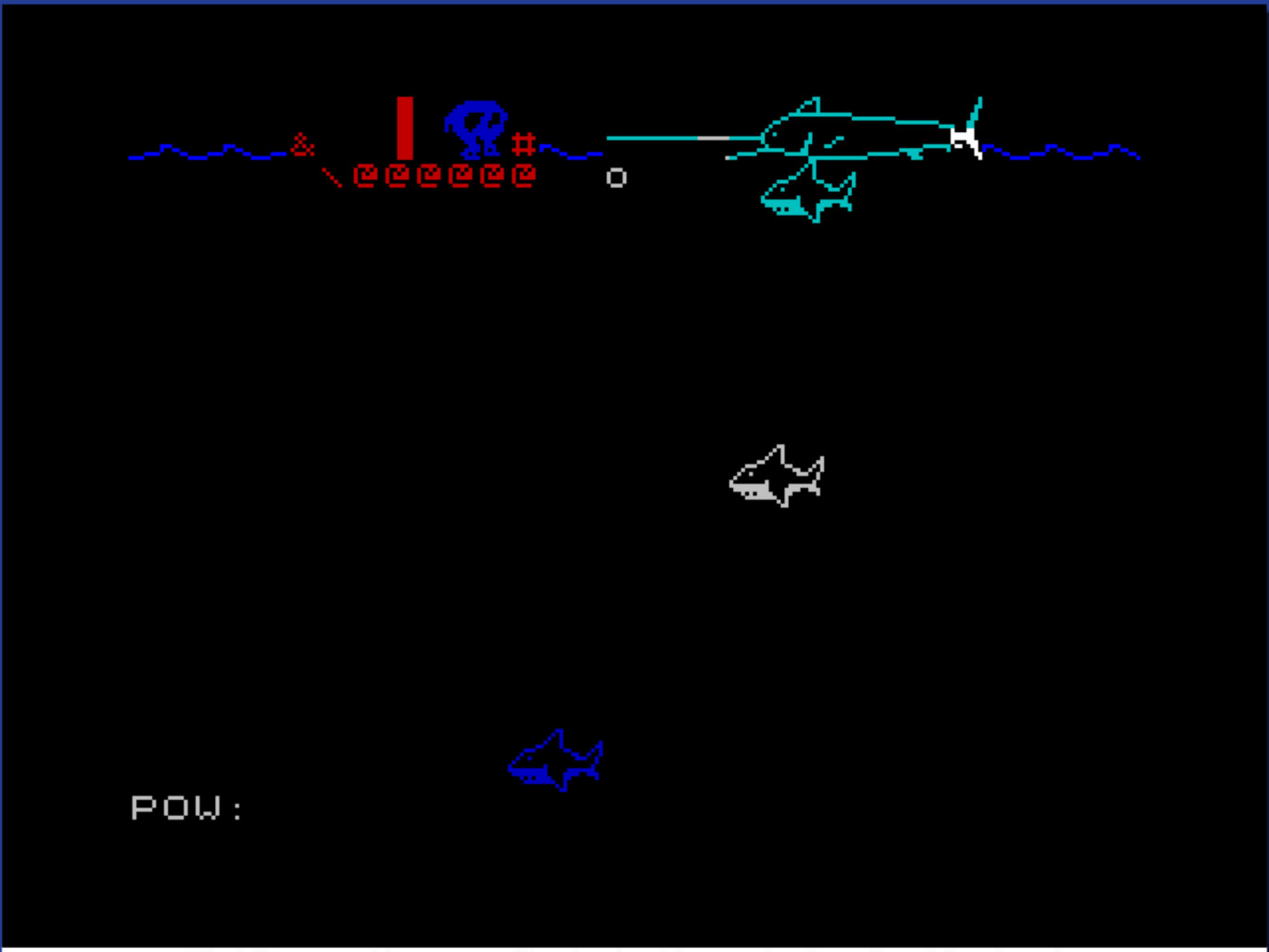
The one that got away.

Now, here’s a funny story: I recently encouraged my son to read The Old Man and the Sea. While playing this game, I found it incredibly challenging—almost painfully so—due to the intense button-mashing required. I joked that the old man in Hemingway’s story had it easier than this! Later, I discovered that the game is actually based on that classic novella.

Fish is essentially two mini-games inspired by Hemingway’s timeless tale. The first involves wrestling with a fishing rod to catch a fish. If you manage to hook a marlin, the second mini-game begins, where you must defend your catch from swarms of sharks and try to make it back home. Both mini-games are beautifully presented and well worth experiencing.

relaxing
ing”

What I find so fascinating about BASIC games is how they allow developers to express their creativity, resulting in unique and unexpected experiences. I just wish I could get the hang of the first mini-game! Think of it as Daley Thompson goes fishing on his day off and is filled with regret.



First it was spiders, now it’s sharks. Horace just can’t catch a break.

Throbbing Headache DX

KTB Productions
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44015
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44066
PWYW / $2

Sloany's Review

Back when the Simpsons was good, there was an episode where Homer was fed doughnuts for all eternity as an ironic punishment. As the machine runs out of donuts Homer screams "more!" in the face of an exasperated demon. That dear reader, is how I feel about single screen arcade games, especially if they are on the ZX Spectrum, I just cannot get enough of them. Throbbing Headache DX (THDX to its friends) by relative newcomer on the Speccy homebrew scheme, "Rrwm" is one such game.

> *"You get used to its strange ways"*

THDX follows on from both the original version of the game (which was coded in an astonishing 2 days) and the special Valentine's Edition (Throbbing Heartache). The DX version expands the virus infused nightmare that Robby, the game's protagonist, suffered in the original, with improved graphics and sound and more levels. Well, Robby's misery is our gain as that just means there's more of this game to get stuck into.

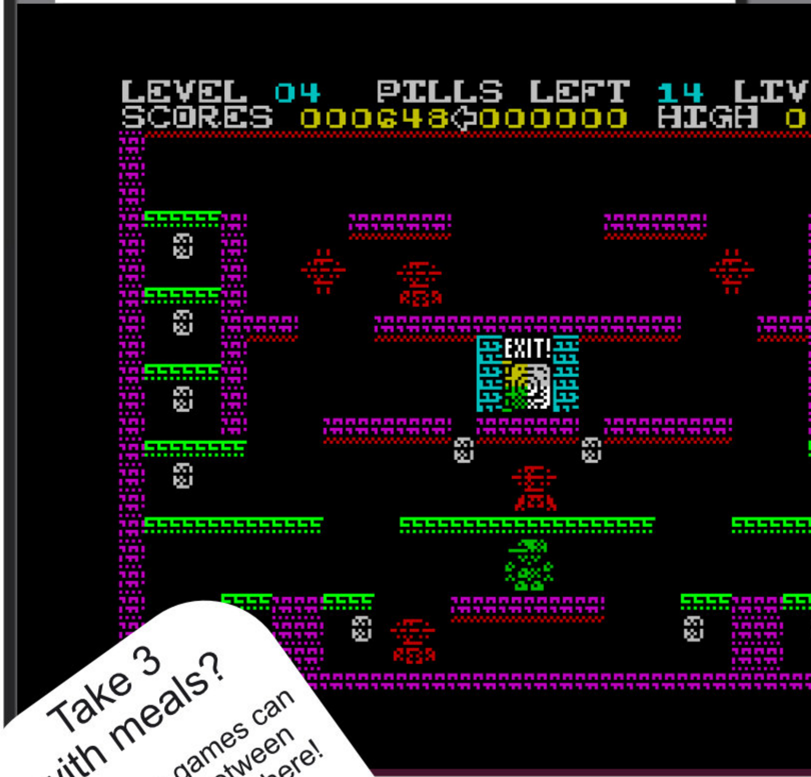
Right out of the blocks THDX is an assault on your senses as it hits you with its disorienting intro menu full of pulsating brains and bonkers font. Then you're right into it, you know the drill, MacGuffins to collect, nasties to avoid and exits to trigger.

One of the first things you'll notice is that the jumping mechanic takes a bit of getting used to, with our hero only being able to pull off funky long sideways or upwards jumps. There is nothing for fans of diagonal jumps here, my friend. This lends a puzzle-like element to proceedings as you have to strategically work out the best order in which to collect the pills and clear the screen. It's unusual and frustrating at first and will result in many lives lost and copious swearing. Once you've played it a few times and clear a few levels however, you get used to its strange ways and it provides that game with a bit of a USP to help it stand out among its many, many peers.

It's a tough old game, but with a sensible, if somewhat steep difficulty curve. The levels are very well designed with a real fiendish, almost sadistic edge. Thankfully there's no time limit or fall damage or the game would be just too plain evil to have fun with. Personally, I think a few more than 3 lives wouldn't go amiss however, especially if you are to see anything approaching the 24 levels the game has to offer but I'm told that that's what save states are for. Not that I use them myself obviously! (Fourth-wall-breaking eyebrows wiggle to camera)

The music and sound effects suit the game nicely and the graphics are great, with the main character looking cute as hell in his rather funky baseball cap. There is a ULA+ mode, but I don't think that adds too much really and personally I prefer the original vibrant hues of a classic Speccy.

I had a lot of fun with this one, there's a real satisfaction to reaching the exit on each screen. I am totally on board with the author's sense of humour too, which shines through every aspect of this game from the psychedelic intro right through to the Matthew Smith referencing big foot and game over message at the end. I genuinely think I've found a kindred Speccy spirit here and I'm already looking forward to seeing what they come up with next.
Right, fire up that donut machine. I need another hit.



That's a lot of pills, Robby. C

Take 3 with meals?

Sometimes games can take years between sequels, but not here!

Throbbing Headache released on Jan 19.

This was Followed rapidly by Throbby Heartache in time for Valentine's Day in February, with the upgraded Throbbing Headache DX arriving on Feb 24.

Rumour has it there's another game planned in the series this year. No rest for the Throbby!

Some pokes to prevent migraines :
x Lives : POKE 27683,x
Infinite lives : POKE 27787,0

Mpk's (Throbby Heartyache) Review

Ah, young love! Having, presumably, overcome his headache, Robby and his main squeeze Roberta find themselves collecting love hearts. I imagine that's a metaphor of some kind. Perhaps he needs to make up for his complaining about his sore head. Men, eh? Bunch of babies.

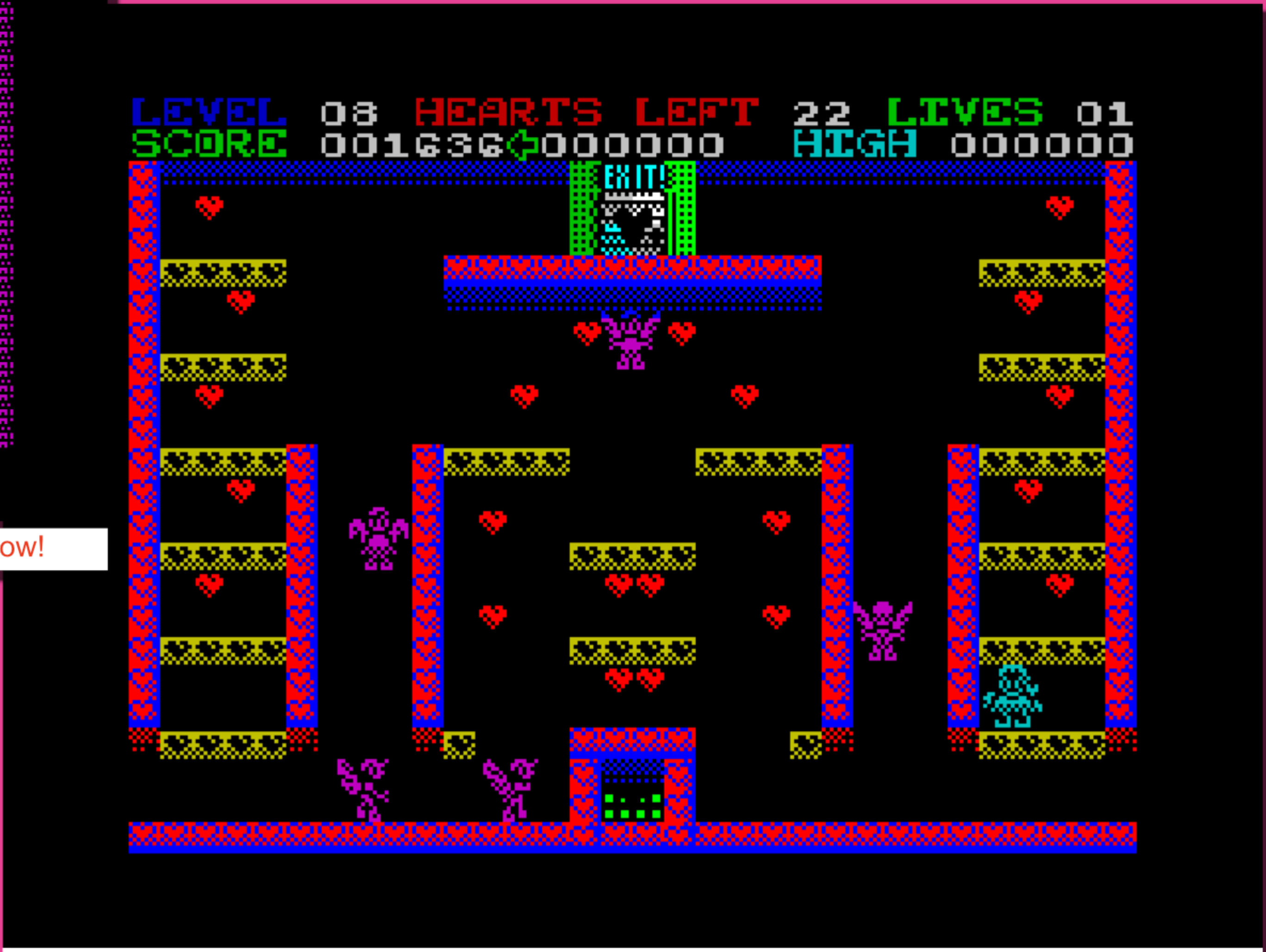
Regardless, Throbby Heartache builds on the engine of Throbbing Headache, delivering another 20 levels of unique platforming. The stressy techno trimmings of the original are replaced with hearts and cherubs, and you get to select which of the doting couple you want to control, Ant Attack-style. The characters handle precisely the same, although Roberta starts on the right-hand slide of each level, while Robby starts on the left.

As mentioned in the Throbbing Headache overview to my left, the key to both games is the unique jumping mechanic. The mix of strong vertical jumps and dynamic horizontal leaps offers a unique twist to what could be otherwise very familiar gameplay. Coupled with devious level design tailored to your mobility, both games feel thoroughly fresh.

THDX is the latest version of the engine, but the levels and gameplay in Heartache are on a par. Both are heartily recommended.

Need a good poke on Valentine's Dayr Naturally.
x ives - POKE 29616,x
Infinte Lives - POKE 29666,0

areful now!


LEVEL 08 HEARTS LEFT 22 LIVES 01
SCORE 001636 000000 HIGH 000000
EXIT

"I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth"
Roberta's got you beat, Bard. 22 of the blighters here!

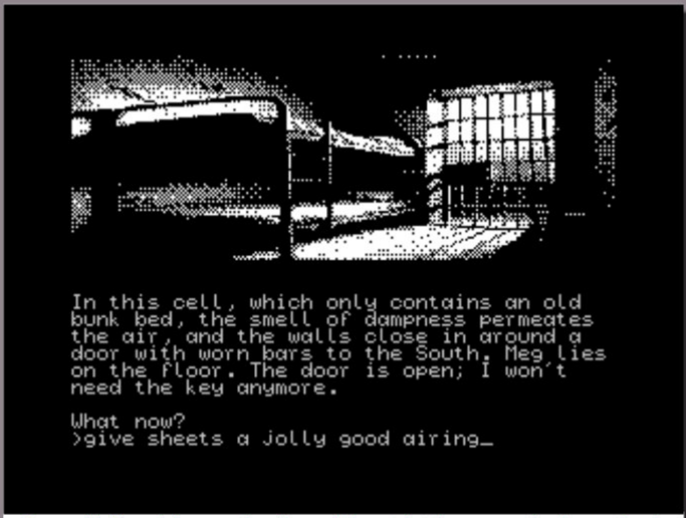
Erinia

Daniel Revenga
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44145
$4.00

Dave's Review

Erinia started life in 2020 as a text-only, Spanish-only, adventure for the 48K. The original PAWs game was updated with 'DAAD Ready', a modern tool to make el Disenador de Aventuras AD more accessible, so we now have this glossy, illustrated adventure in both Spanish & English, and on disk. So once you've dug out your trusty +3, replaced the broken drive belt a couple of times and cursed the day it was born, you can open your laptop and play it in your emulator of choice.

The story begins in prison (remember it was written during lockdown) on the isolated oceanic island of Erinia, or more accurately Project Erinia, as you will discover. You have long since forgotten how you came to be here, if indeed you ever knew. You play Tisiphone, about to put an escape plan into action with your cell-mate Meg (nice juxtaposition of futuristic and prosaic names there – hopefully we'll meet Anakin & Barry later).



```
In this cell, which only contains an old
bunk bed, the smell of dampness permeates
the air, and the walls close in around a
door with worn bars to the South. Meg lies
on the floor. The door is open; I won't
need the key anymore.

What now?
>give sheets a jolly good airing_
```

Poor old Meg, lying on the floor. At least let them use the lower bunk

The English translation is fine— it might say "flashlight", but it understands "torch". We have plenty of 'damp cells' and 'constant low hums resonating', which scene-set an oppressive atmosphere without resorting to INK 3 prose. It's the pictures that do most of the talking though. All black & white, they look cleaned-up enough to not appear lazily-digitised, yet dirty enough to be edgy and dystopian. In a couple of instances the images are dynamic, one case seeing a drawbridge either up or down depending on how curious you were about a certain lever elsewhere.

The narrator gives plenty of help, As examples, you are told when an object is no longer needed, and that it might be a good idea to turn the electricity back on after fixing the cables. The most battle-hardened adventurer may find it too easy and

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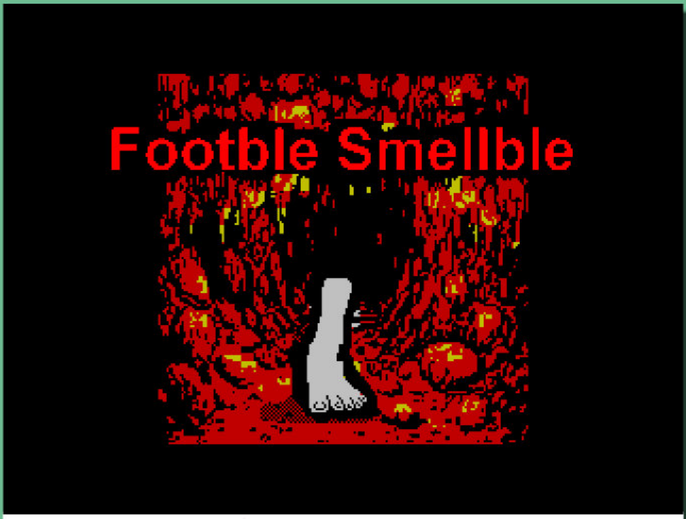
Footble Smellble

DJPoke
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44113
Free



A foot on a mission

Mpk's Review

First impressions are important.

And for a Speccy game, the very first impression is frequently the 'redefine keys' option, which is an issue here. There are 5 keys in use, including Pause, and the redefine keys menu allows you to set 1 of them. O & P are hardcoded as left & right, which is fine, but then you're left with C for Jump and X for Fire. Weird defaults by any standards, and the cause of many frustrating errors.

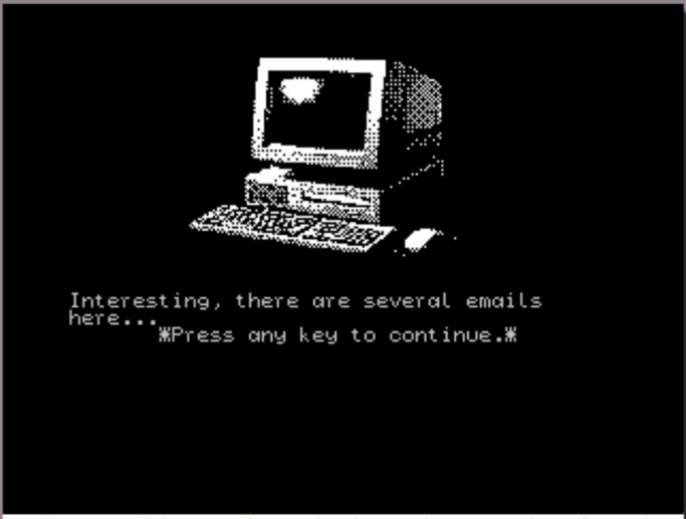
And that's a genuine shame, as otherwise the game is pretty dandy.

It's a smooth single-screen arcade-style game that focuses on a stinky old foot, which hops around, blasting out smells to neutralise invading aliens. Also weird, but in a good way this time.

The uncomplicated platform levels are littered with assorted alien types, which you must clear to complete each level, and soap bubbles which are optionally collectible to pad out your score. The game is deceptively difficult. The simple kill 'em all gameplay never requires much forethought, but there are sections where the margin for error is toe-curlingly tight. A 3-life limit is rather stingey as well, adding old-school challenge.

> *"hopping about with purpose"*

Sound is minimal in-game, but there's a terrific



```
Interesting, there are several emails
here...
        *Press any key to continue.*
```

Damn this confounded modern technology!

mollycoddling, but the rest of us will be thankful. A lot of thought has gone into avoiding the usual text adventure pitfalls like ‘guess the verb’ or endless purposeless wandering.

If you still struggle, then the author has been excessively merciful and provided a solution in the form of Tisiphone’s diary. I’d say solve the game yourself, then read that.

Less common features are keeping on top of your health and ammo. As you learn more about Project Erinia, you’ll encounter different baddies and both get depleted when you fight. Thankfully the battles are not in real time*, but the number of turns does count: it would be a bad idea to examine a table while a gaggle of mutants is clawing at your face, for example.
There’s a couple of bugs to be aware of, one more fatal than the other: if you try to “pull lever” it thinks you want to “quit” the game! So levers should only be pushed and never pulled. Also “search” is interpreted as “shoot” for some reason.

All in all, it’s a perfect entry-level text adventure. And there’s a twist...

Mpk’s Comments

Text Adventures, or any game featuring a story, really, have a problem with difficulty. On one hand, the player wants to be challenged. On the other hand, they want to get to the rest of the story, and getting stuck on a tricky section is irritating. And some players like the tough puzzles, and some, like me, are more story-driven. You can’t please everyone.

Erinia is pretty soundly in the story category. The puzzles are straight forward, thankfully free of parser issues. The presentation is also excellent.

I’m not a big fan of the timed combat events, where you do in fact have to type as quickly as possible - you will die if you do nothing. But that’s at least unique, and not a major problem. A satisfying tale then, which won’t leave you unfairly frustrated.

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*as was tried, somewhat experimentally in Saboteur Deep Cover.

---

bouncy tune to accompany the menu screen (on 128k machines at least). The main foot sprite is nicely animated, hopping about with purpose, while the aliens are suitably ‘orrible.

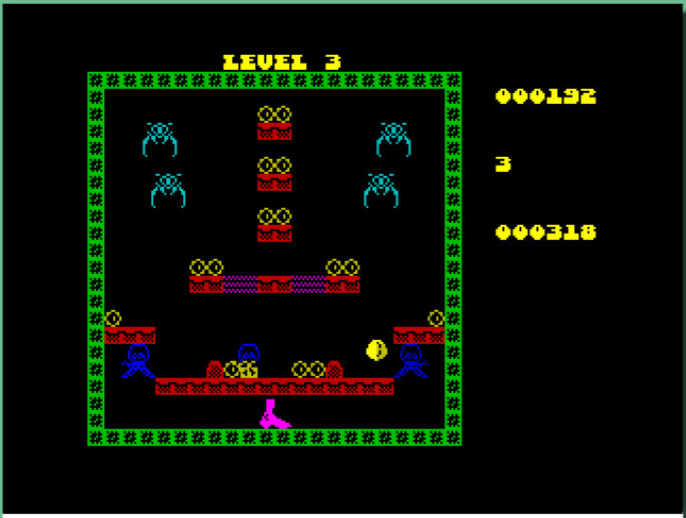
To sum up : a fun first time effort from another Speccy newcomer. As an aside, it took me ages to figure out why the name is spelt like that. I wonder if AL figured it out?

Al’s Comment

Actually, Mpk, I was fully expecting to play a football game when I saw this title, although the second word did seem... odd.
But after a while the similarity to good old Bubble Bobble was obvious and all became clear! It's not the best pun I've ever heard, if I'm being honest.

“Happy and bouncy and rather good fun”

But I'm happy to say that the gaming outperforms the punning here. It's all very happy and bouncy and rather good fun to play. The eerily dismembered foot hops around nicely and the baddies move in such a way as to catch out the unwary, which keeps you on



Word to your Moms; the pale ones drop bombs

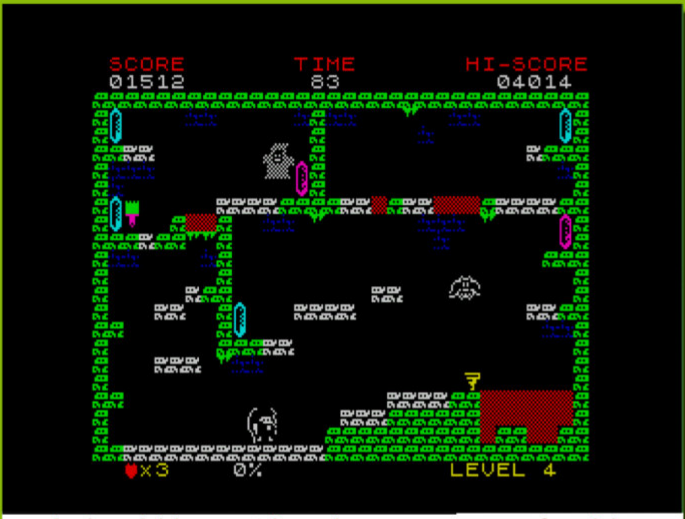
your toes. So to speak. And another foot in a Speccy game is sure to have Miner Willy worried...

So I think the next thing on DJ Poke's to do list should be to build on his existing skills after this promising debut and do us a new, improved update of Rainbow Islands. And put some colour in it please mate, the original wasn't half a drab, grey affair

Neither of us thought to put in a 'footnote'? Tsk. -Ed

Bearded Fantasy

JuanGM
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44027
PWYW / $2



I should be getting danger money for this

Dave's Review

The title doesn't give much away. It could be anything from a Dumbledore text adventure to a Point & Click game indulging your Auntie Edna's more savoury thoughts about Noel Edmonds. As it turns out, Bearded Fantasy is a rather fresh and fun painting platform game. You play a nameless beard tasked with painting a haunted castle while dodging the nasties. These nasties being patrolling ghosts, lava and other lethal hazards that have been the bane of platform game tradesmen for decades.

Normally, a paint job involves slapping on a couple of coats of something neutral with a quirky name. Here however, the walls are already done and your task is to paint the floors in a matching green – presumably called 'Frothy Pistachio' or something on the tin.

> "fantastic cartoon realisation of a beard on legs"

I love the player sprite. Using a few well crafted lines against a black background, it makes a fantastic cartoon realisation of a beard on legs. I have to admit that initially, I was looking at it wrong and could see a figure in a big black coat. The French have a phrase for that: "Eet treeks ze aye" or something.

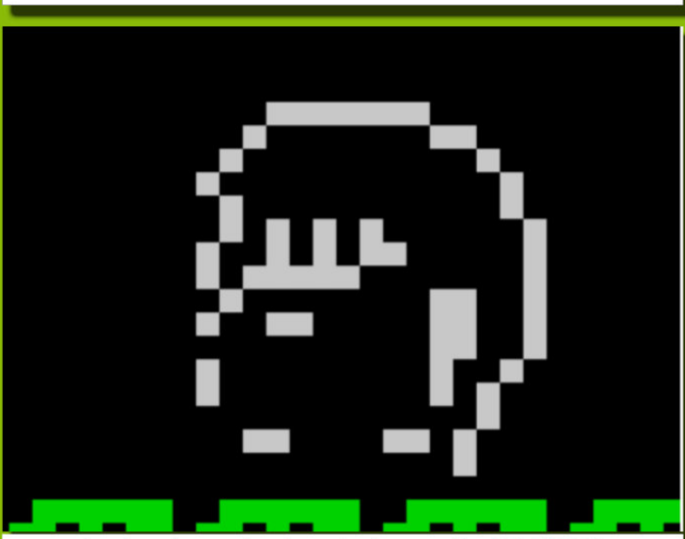
Bearded Fantasy is made with ZX-Boriel, which allowed JuanGM to unleash his creativity in BASIC while keeping the speed of machine code. What it also means is that you don't move smoothly in pixels but clunk in character squares. This is generally fine and the speed hides it—we don't want every game to handle the same—but it does make a few jumps harder than they ought to be.

It's eight single screen levels, which IMO is the perfect length for the modern player. With our busy lives and smartphone addled attention spans, we're less likely to finish a massive epic than BITD. That doesn't mean Bearded Fantasy is shallow. While you can play it through like any platform game and not have to think *tooo* much about it, there are important nuances: as you complete 75% of the screen, a magic potion appears that acts like a Pacman pill. Knowing that, the player can tactically finish certain sections of the screen first, knowing they won't have to leave the difficult baddy corner to chance later. You can jump through unpainted blocks, but not painted ones. That's a subtle but important mechanic, which can be ignored, but you'll be gnashing your teeth a lot less if you don't.

There is also the rarest of features—a time limit which I'm glad is there. It spurs you on, and it turns the easier levels into time trials where marginal gains come into play. Some levels have conveyors that need painting twice, and others have little gem shaped teleporters, springs and trampolines that can be used to your advantage.

The sound effects are default samples from Shiru's BeepFX, and they're fine, but most of us have heard them a few times before. It's a great tool that is begging to be tinkered with.

This is a great first game from the author, and according to him, a 128K version is in the works with AY music, extra levels, and 'more surprises'. I hope he isn't tempted to go too big, but rather develop some extra features, and make more of the solid painted block mechanic. All in all, like the simple but effective thuds and beeps of the intro tune, this is music to my ears. Muchas gracias Juan!



Just a few pixels - but mostly BEARD.

Andy's Comment

During play this game seems to depict Captain Caveman (or BC Bill) doing some redecorating. The chap on the loading screen, however, is more of a heroic archetype, appearing to wear armour - odd attire for someone tasked with repainting. I suspect this picture, along with the title Bearded Fantasy, is from his Tinder profile rather than accurately representing 'Geoff', who spends his days in overalls.

> "Rarely has painting floors been so much fun"

Whilst the overall sheen is slightly tarnished by the hero's character square movement and the minor inconsistency in determining which of the player's four UDGs count as being 'on' a platform or enemy, Bearded Fantasy is a rather charming little platform gem. Rarely has painting floors been so much fun. The gameplay additions in later levels add variety and keep you coming back for more. It's hard not to recall Bounty Bob Strikes Back, with its similar floor-colouring mechanic and the teleporter that make an early appearance though the two are different enough for avid floor-painters to want both in their collections. I actually much prefer the graphics here - especially the main character - over the 1985 game which was somewhat hideous. Certainly, fans of one would be advised to check out the other.

Overall, Bearded Fantasy is a lovely addition to the vast number of platformers out there, with enough of its own character to be worthy of your time.

Mpk's Comment

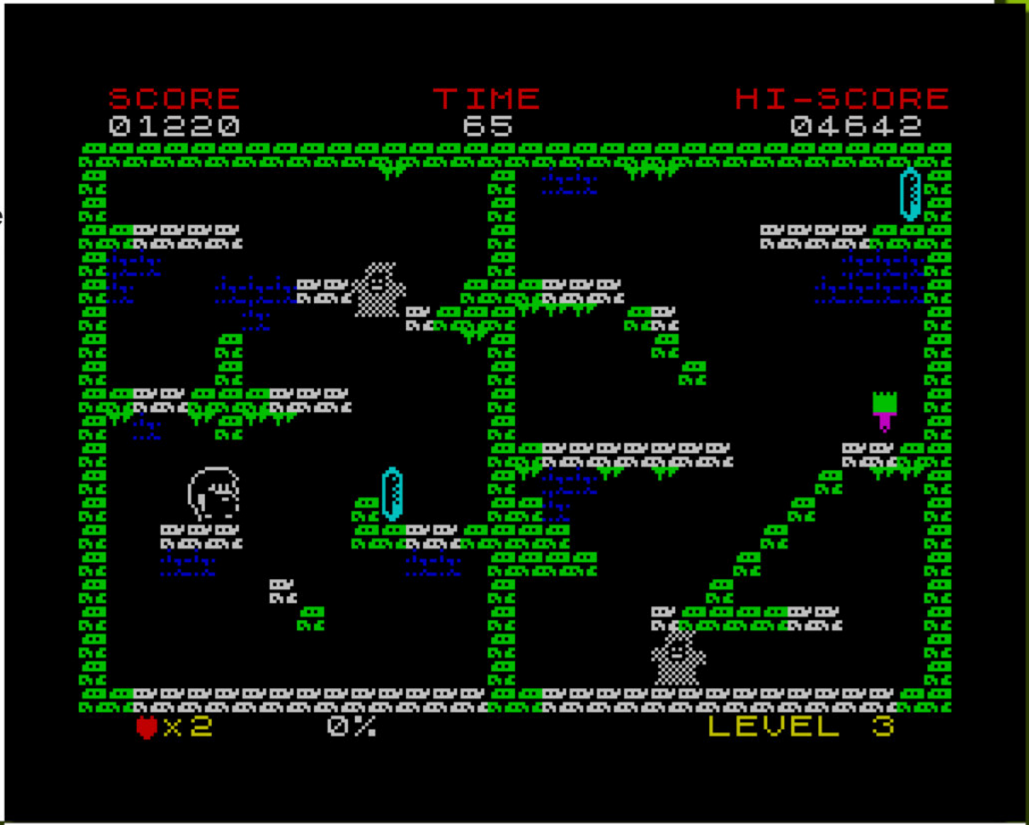
I'm going to just ignore the weird name. And the A.I. cover art that I could live without. Brass tacks then : is this any good?

Yeah! It is.

Despite itself, really. The blocky movement that the other two mention is a drawback, and makes it difficult to judge jumps, and landings. I never felt like I was entirely in control, which can be irritating when flopping into some lava near the end of a level. But the design trumps the engine issues here. Each level adds something to keep the already fresh play popping, and you won't even get paint in your beard. There's only a handful of levels, but that's fine too. It's not going to outstay its welcome, and while it lasts, quaffing a beer then beating up on some bats is just as satisfying here as it is in real life.

There are a lot of platformers on the Speccy, and they really need to have something unique to stand out. The painting here, coupled with the 75% power-up, elevate this above competitors that might well have better engines and smoother controls, but are lacking that little bit of originality. It's a little bit short at just 8 levels, but quality beats quantity, I guess.

In the end, it's great to see another first-time author coming out of their corner swinging, and landing some solid blows. They just maybe need some fancy footwork for next time.



A BRUSH with danger! No? Nothing? Suit yourselves.

Jurl

Tonsomo / Johnny Blanchard
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44080
$1

Sloany's Review

The Jurly bird catches the worm, but all Jurl Hogrind is interested in catching is diamonds, lots of diamonds. Catching them at any cost too, even if it means all out intergalactic war and the destruction of Earth. You see, mankind has been a pushy little brat of late, throwing its weight around and expanding beyond the stars and into the territory of some ETs that are understandably none too chuffed at having their space invaded by Earth idiots.

With a blatant disregard for diplomacy and delicate peace negotiations, you play the eponymous "hero" and self-proclaimed "greatest Star Diamond miner in the galaxy" who just wants to steam in there and take advantage of those space diamonds that are sitting about waiting for the picking, regardless of the consequences for his home planet.

Billed as "Asteroids meets Pacman", Jurl has graced a number of platforms now with versions for the PC, Master System, PC Engine, Lynx, Gameboy, Atari 2600 and now the humble ZX Spectrum. The game really wears its golden era arcade origins on its sleeve, with strong elements of Lunar Lander and Solar Fox thrown into the mix.

In the fine tradition of 48k Speccy games having screechy classical music intros, when you load it up you're greeted with a beeper version of Beethoven's Für Elise. However, let's get this out of the way from the off, this game is tough. Really tough. If I may borrow from Douglas Adams, you just won't believe how vastly hugely mind-bogglingly tough it is.

The first level (level 0) eases you into the game. Here you are on your own, blipping about collecting diamonds without any pesky aliens to bother you, and a good job too because controlling the ship is extremely tricky. You might think, "how hard can it be to control a ship with just 3 controls? (left, right & thrust)" Well, I'll tell you - it's a right swine!

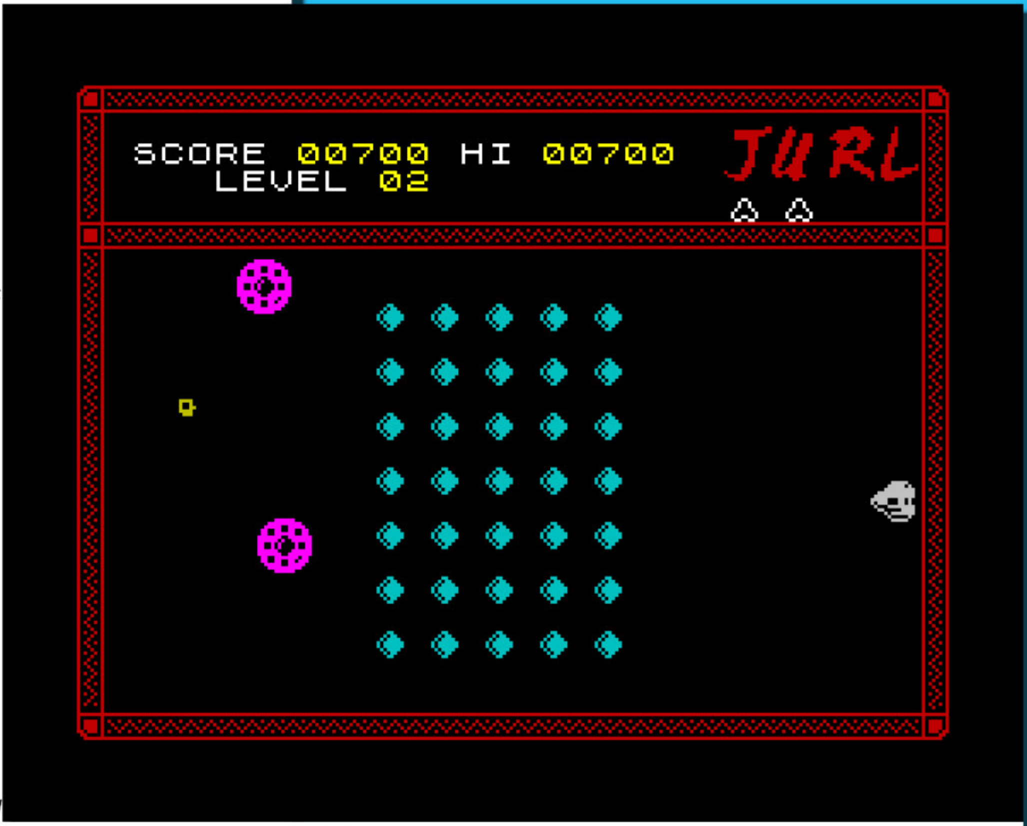
This level is great for getting to grips with just how sensitive the controls are and how delicate you need to be in order to regain some control over the ship. It's also good for getting the chance to launch full tilt and bounce around at top speed without any consequences, because the ship moves so smoothly and it's so much FUN!

> ***"this game is tough"***

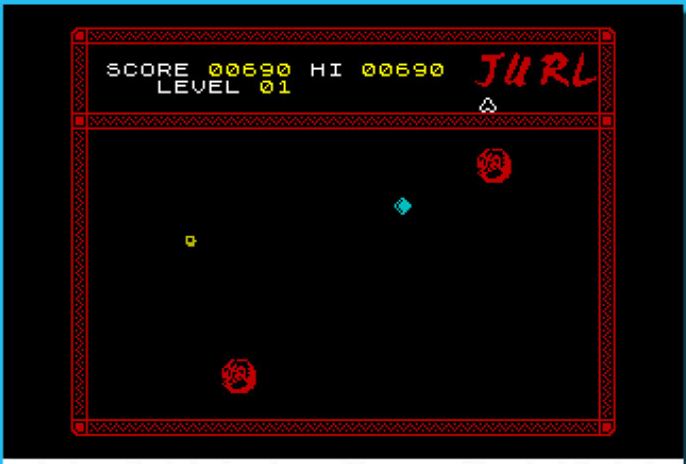
Once you've cleared the first screen (and even without enemies it still takes a bit of time to complete) then the trouble really begins. The second level (level 1) throws two, albeit slow moving and non-firing, foes into the mix. Here you have to really start focusing on your wayward ship, as one small overshoot will see you careering into them and smashing into smithereens. Get used to it, it'll be happening a lot. Progress can be made however and the satisfaction of being able to actually clear a screen makes you feel like a god.

Although far too difficult for my skills, the whole thing has been coded with a very slick sheen and a clear love for classic arcade action. It's only a dollar on Itch and its purchase will encourage the author to make further Speccy games which would only be good thing, especially if they are as well coded as this one. Although hopefully a little more geared for mere mortals to play, eh?

Come and have a go if you think you're hard enough!



Get dunked on by doughnuts.



Just one final elusive diamond to go, and I've died. Typical.

Mpk's Comment

Sloany's not kidding about this being tough - it's as hard as those diamonds you're collecting. Initially, the speed and responsiveness that your craft displays on the enemy-free Level 0 is impressive, and there's a kinetic fun in just bouncing off the walls.

But once an actual threat is introduced on Level 1, you'll quickly become aware that actually making use of that speed is a terrible idea - you'll carom off a wall into an alien in no time. Instead, you'll mostly be tiptoeing around at low velocities, carefully rotating and applying gentle corrections like an Apollo astronaut.

The collision detection on the diamonds is very fine too - almost pixel-perfect, to the extent that you'll sometimes send yourself drifting through a cloud of them without actually picking any up.

The levels get a little harder as you progress, with different aliens exhibiting different behaviours, but perhaps could use a little more variety.

A proper challenge then, but once you've adjusted your expectations a little and get to live with the idea that slow and steady will win the diamonds, you'll find it a quietly stressful but satisfying one.

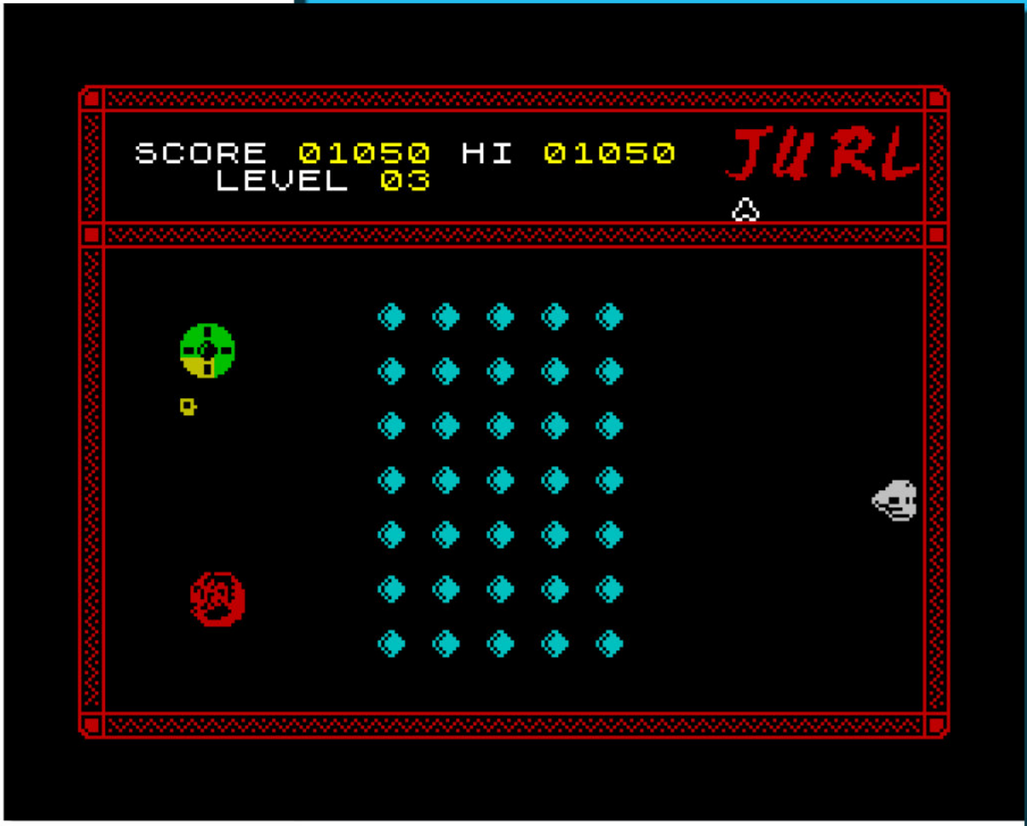
> ***"Stressful but satisfying"***

Al's Comment

Asteroids meets Pacman eh? Pacsteroids it is then. What an interesting idea, to mash up two classic arcade staples of old and create a crazy new thing. What else could we do that to? I reckon Frogger could definitely use some Space Invaders to liven it up and perhaps Centipede could make an attempt at grabbing Donkey Kong's danglies and young Mario's gal into the bargain (I thought Mario was largely sexless actually, what gives? Still, everyone was young once)

"Bleeuurrgh", oh sorry, "Jurl" has quite an old skool feel, combining the terrifying permanently out-of-controlness of say, Thrust when you run out of talent (very early on in my case) and popping pills. Or Diamonds really. "Wakka wakka aaarrrggghh" as Pacman piloting a spaceship might opine.

I really like this here game. I managed to get to level 4 or 5 I think, quite often displaying a level of ship control which might have impressed anyone watching, had there been anyone. It's usually a case of 'slowly slowly catchy monkey' before soon becoming 'this monkey's spinning around uncontrollably and vomiting bananas everywhere" Nah, it's a good 'un but might just drive you as crazy as trying to hit that darned final brick on any given Arkanoid level."



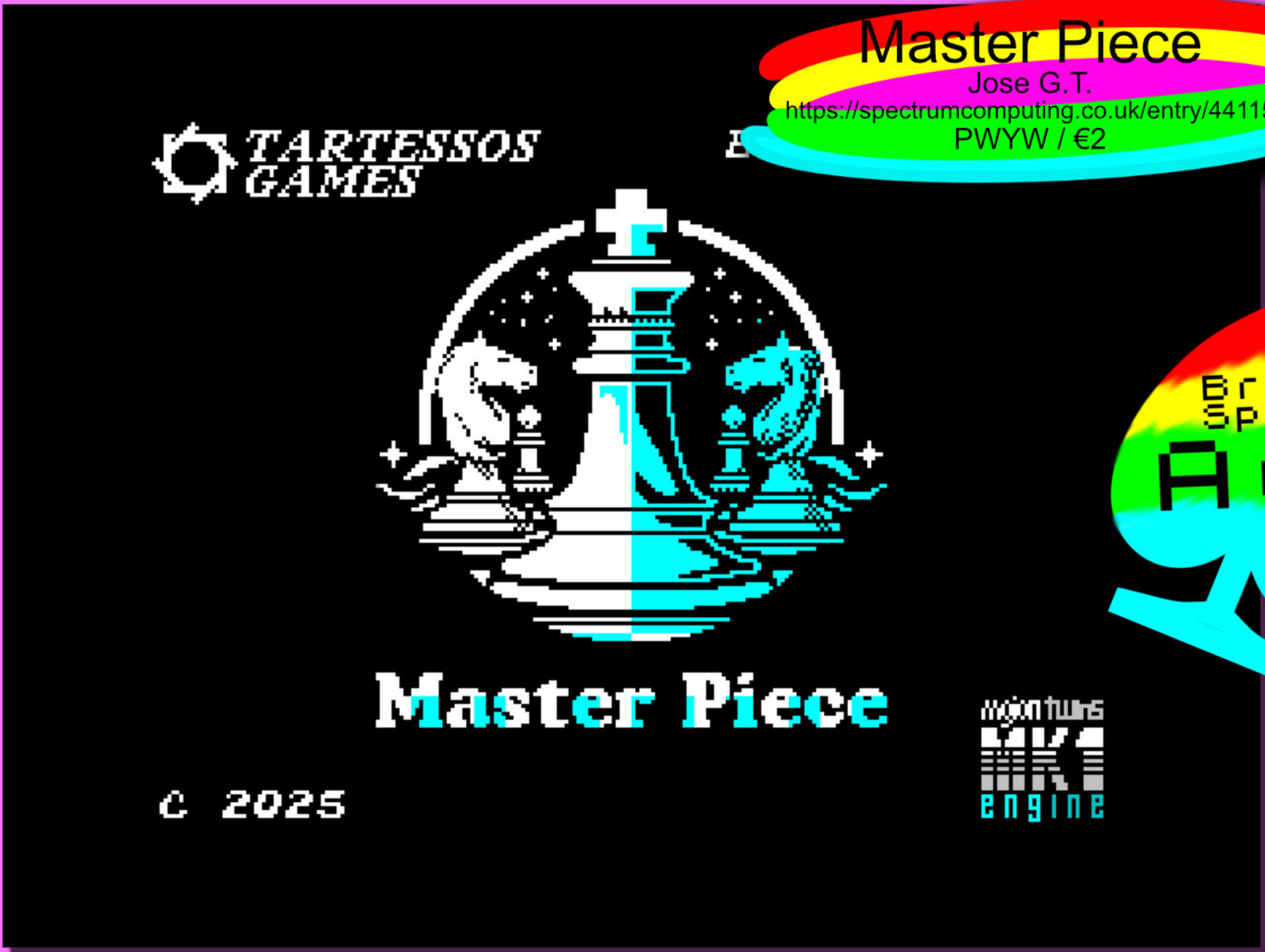
Getting trickier now - that green one will home in on you

Master Piece

Jose G.T.

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44115

PWYW / €2


TARTESSOS GAMES
Master Piece
C 2025
mojon twins
MK1
engine

Chessington World of Adventure

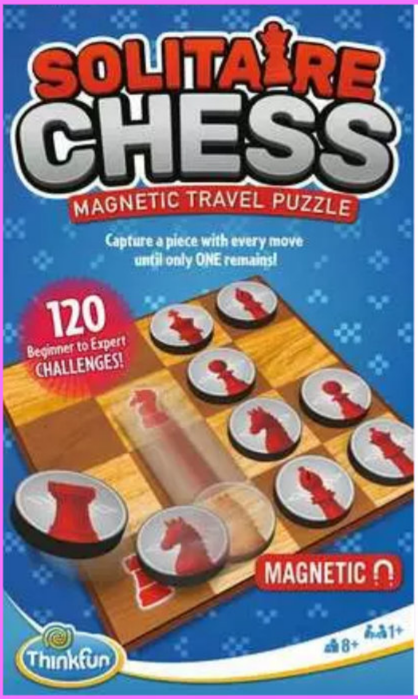
Mpk's Review

For a few weeks now, I've had a sheet of paper on my desk with a bunch of 4-digit codes on it. These are level codes for Master Piece, a modest yet terrific puzzle game that sets single-player chess puzzles. 199 of them in all, growing progressively more devious. One of the hallmarks of a good puzzle game is that you can get stuck - hopelessly stymied - by a level, go away for a while and come back with fresh eyes and just breeze through it. It's obvious, sometimes, when you don't think about it. Master Piece has that in spades.

Each puzzle takes place on a 4x4 chess grid, and starts off with a number of chess pieces in place. You can move the pieces as normal for chess, but every move must take out another piece, and you solve the level by ending up with exactly 1 piece (The Master Piece) left on the board. Simple as that. You can always reset the board to the start of the level, and there's no timeout or anything. Each level comes with a 4-character passcode so you can restart at that point after reloading.

The 199 levels should be enough to keep you going for a while. It never deviates from the 4x4 space, which sounds limiting, but trust me, you won't be stuck for challenge. This won't be for everyone, but if you like a bit of puzzling and know how chess pieces work, then you'll have a great time with this. Just remember to note down the level code and take a break if you feel your teeth grinding at all.

> *"You won't be stuck for challenge"*


SOLITAIRE CHESS
MAGNETIC TRAVEL PUZZLE
Capture a piece with every move until only ONE remains!
120 Beginner to Expert CHALLENGES!
MAGNETIC
ThinkFun
8+
1+

If you fancy tearing yourself away from your screens for a bit, you can do worse than pick up a copy of the Solitaire Chess boardgame from the always reliable Thinkfun.

Only 120 puzzles in the current version versus the 199 in Master Piece, but hey. You can't have everything.

Sloany’s Review

When I was a kid, I was really into action games, but I was ever so much younger then and these days I have a growing love for a good puzzler. We have been absolutely spoiled for top notch puzzle games on the Speccy recently, with SkillTeam, Quadrax and this literal masterpiece.

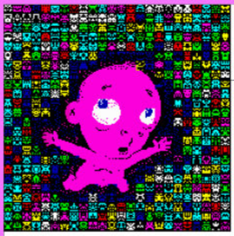
Nothing is so good it lasts eternally but with 199 levels there’s plenty to keep you entertained, thankfully there’s a handy password system. I've been enjoying quick bursts of this on my Next, my phone and laptop. It’s a very portable game that can be played anywhere and one town's very like another when your head's down over your pieces, brother.

There are some outright fiendish levels and sometimes perfect situations must go wrong, however Master Piece can be played at a sedate pace. There’s no time limit or lives to worry about and you can reset your level for those times when looking back, you could have played it differently, could have played it some other way.

I love it when an unassuming game comes along out of nowhere & grips the Speccy community, with some calling it the ultimate test of cerebral fitness.

Although there’s no music, it means you can listen to tunes of your choosing. Appropriately enough I’ve been listening to the soundtrack from hit musical Chess. I don’t know who can tell.

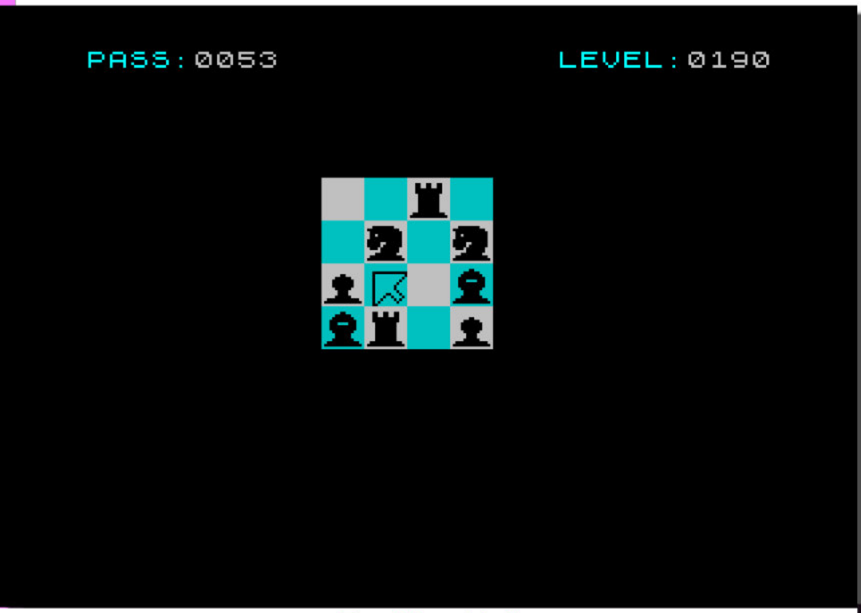
Dave’s Comment



Master Piece is made with the MK1 engine – aka ‘La Churrera’, commonly known for making a distinctive type of arcade action game. So to make a Solitaire Chess game using MK1 is a bit unusual, but not, as it turns out, completely bonkers—it’s more like making a cup of tea in a microwave than cooking Gumbo in a washing machine.

In brutal terms, Retro gamers are a dwindling, jaded, and increasingly hard to please audience, so it’s fantastic to see the attention generated by Master Piece. Going by the buzz on the internet, it’s responsible for the most collective hours spent Speccy gaming for a long time (and quite possibly a few DVT’s too).

Most of the levels are fast, satisfying snacks that take a few minutes each, and the challenging levels are so cleverly within reach that you KNOW you can solve them; So 199 levels sounds a lot, but you’ll pass the halfway milestone without even realising.



Rooking Hell

Solitaire Chess is a fascinating riff on the ~900 year old board game, possibly because it reduces the power of all the pieces except the King. You naturally think "I can't lose a Queen yet!", but that's sometimes exactly what you have to do, yielding a phalanx for a lowly pawn to gobble up. Most of us had never heard of Solitaire Chess before, so we have to thank Master Piece for introducing us in such a well-made package.

If that’s not gift enough, then the farty raspberry noise you get on solving a difficult level will be.

Martian War

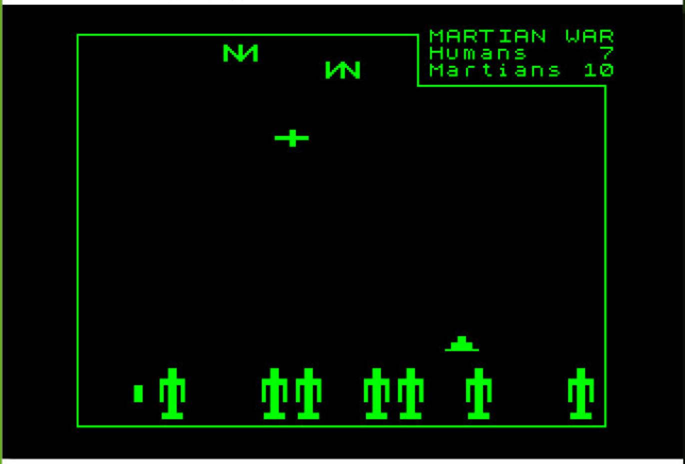
Fausto Pracek
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44161
Free

Jamie's Review

Martian War is a remake of a game for an even older computer than the ZX Spectrum. Ever heard of the Wang 2200? No, neither had I until today. The Wang 2200 was first released in 1973, and is a beautifully nostalgic looking machine, green case with a crisp, integrated monochrome CRT monitor and a super high quality keyboard. The Wang was an office machine, and not really a gaming powerhouse, however a handful of games were developed for it, including the original Martian War, which was released in 1980.

Martian War (2025) is a Space Invaders inspired shooter for the ZX Spectrum, tasking players with defending Earth against waves of descending Martian saucers. The game play will be familiar to most:

- Move left/right along the bottom of the screen
- Shoot down Martians before they shoot you, or the humans you are trying to protect.
- Defeat the waves while protecting humanity and you to get to the next level



10-7 Away win? That's my pools coupon ruined.

The controls are responsive enough, the quirk is that once your ship is set in motion, it keeps going in that direction until you press the stop button. Presumably, the choice of keys remain true to the original: 4, 5, 6 and space. Of course this make a lot more sense on the Wang, which has a number pad, but it makes much less sense on the spectrum's more 'economic' approach to user input. Personally I found the game hard to control.

Enemy movement is blocky and I assume this is in keeping with the original. Ships appear left of the screen, right of the screen, and sometimes in between with little warning. When they appear, they unleashing a torrent of lightning fast bullets that will obliterate the humans you are trying to protect, as well as your ship if you don't respond quickly. The game has 3 levels of difficulty, and I was able to make progress in easy mode.

The green-on-black visuals look really nice. The Spectrum does a good job of replicating the crisp green and black CRT of the original Wang. In keeping with the original game, Martian War has simple, blocky graphical style that I really like. However, on the version I played, the game has no loading screen or sound, which is a shame.

This game is a love letter to an obscure game for an obscure computer. I haven't played the original, put I imagine Martian War (2025) is a faithful recreation, and a fitting way to introduce us Speccy fans to an interesting slice of computing's rich history.

Mpk's Comment

Interior : NightClub
Mpk, an aging dullard, is talking to a (much) younger Lady at the bar. She is wearing a tight 1990s-vintage Playstation t-shirt. Chiptunes play in background.

Mpk : So yeah, the Spectrum only had 48kb of memory in 1982, but skilled programmers can still achieve amazing things, if you know what I mean.

Lady : Thats fascinating! Tell me more. Retro games are so hot.

Mpk : Sure, babe. See…

An even Older Fellow (OF) interrupts.

OF : 1982 is barely even retro. I'm an expert in the Wang 2200, which had 64kb of RAM back in 1973. Built-in screen, only 2 colours : Bright Green and Off. Indestructible keyboard. It was a serious business machine, but had some rudimentary games like Martian Wars, which the Spectrum couldn't emulate until 2025.

Lady : Ooooh. That's so retro!

OF : Sure is, sweetheart, Come on back to my place, I'd be happy to show you my Wang.

Lady : Can I touch it?

OF : Maybe, if you're good. But only through the dust cover.

They Leave

Mpk : D'oh! *Slaps forehead* Those Wang guys are so cool. I'll just have to content myself with the playable if slight Martian Wars on my Spectrum. I love the little dance the little people do when I save the Earth. Maybe that'll help me to be cool one day too.

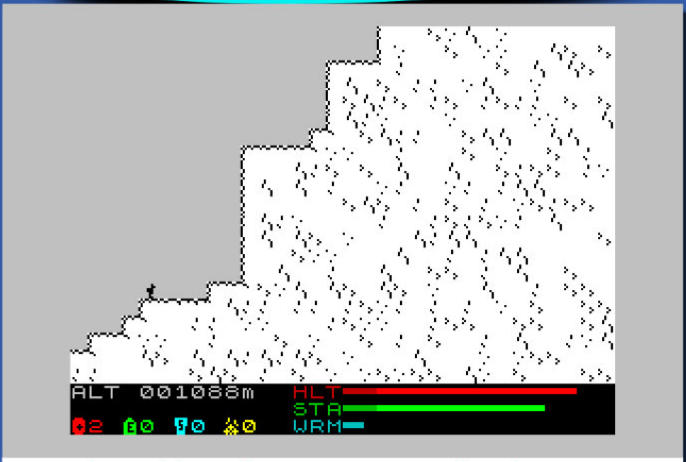
A load of Wang

Everest Challenge

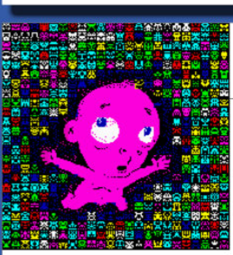
Mustard Tiger

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/43917

Free



I could really use a soup about now.



Dave's Review

In 1953, Sir Edmund Percival Hilary planted both boots firmly at the top of Mount Everest. He surveyed the landscape, then got out his selfie-stick and ordered Sherpa Tenzing to hide. Little did he know, that seventy-odd years later, anyone would be able 'to summit' from the comfort of their own home on a ZX Spectrum.

Everest Challenge is a resource management game with the goal, unsurprisingly, to scale all 8849m of Mount Everest. In the real world, a summit attempt starts around 5000m at base camp, but this game sneers at a poxy 4km ascent and starts you at ZERO. Best not to dwell on the details because finding the nearest place at sea level would mean leaving Nepal entirely!

The graphics are simple, but atmospheric – they may look like UDGs but this is done entirely in assembler and the sprites, well—sprite, moves as smooth-as. Apart from the occasional glowing fire, the game is all white, but it's far from monochrome: the bright vs non-bright PAPER 7 has a huge contrast which is redolent of glistening snow against a brooding slate-grey sky. It's enhanced by the simple beeper pit-pat of your feet.

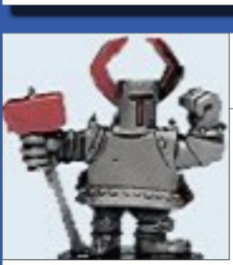
There are not that many things to keep track of, but you will need to read the instructions or you'll be dead before you scale the equivalent of Primrose Hill—a sobering thought for any London-dwelling flaneur. The most important is Health: if this goes then it's literally game over. The most immediate is Stamina: it plummets as you climb and restores while you rest (presumably while ostentatiously blowing into cupped hands as people do). Lose your stamina and you slow to a crawl and your health deteriorates.

Balanced against that is Warmth: it slowly drops when not in a tent or by a fire, but quickly drops when standing. If warmth bottoms out then your health suffers.

POKE your way to the top : 34389,24 can't die; 34045,0 Infinte health drink; 34075,0 Infinite energy drink; 34105,0 Infinite soup

Scattered along the route (possibly by lowly paid and highly expendable Sherpas) are tents, campfires, health & energy supplements, and nourishing hot soup; each of which can be carried up to 3 at a time, and metered out well enough to hopefully see you to the top. You get a choice of 5 routes, each randomly generated by a different seed, and this exposes the game's biggest flaw – there is no difficulty gradient. It doesn't take long to work out a good strategy, and once you've done that then the main challenge is enduring the 3 hour slog to the summit. I completed route 4 over several snapshots and yes it was absorbing & zen, but some jeopardy would have been welcome.

I enjoyed Everest Challenge, and would even say it's better than the real thing—you get to tick a box without risking a cerebral haemorrhage. However, there's a lot of potential for Mustard Tiger to develop it into something shorter, deeper and more thrilling. It could even include a Yeti this time...



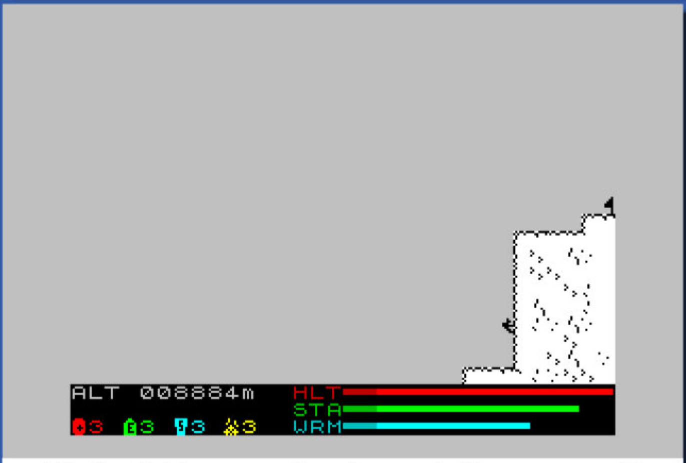
Mpk's Comment

In 1922, when asked why he was going to take up the death-defying challenge of climbing the world's highest mountain, George Mallory paused, gazed into the distance. "Because," he famously replied, "I'm an absolute lunatic. Complete clown of a man, what the hell." Even so, he might well have been part of the first ever summit a year later, but he never made it back down.

Some other lunatics followed in his footsteps in the meantime though, and now Everest provides an annual spectacle of dentists and salesmen with $100k to burn getting dragged up a hill by underpaid Sherpas.

Everest Challenge takes us back to the 1920s era, with a solo lunatic trudging ever upwards on the worst-planned expedition imaginable. As a game, it's a calming experience, as your stoic little character keeps putting one foot in front of the other, trudging in a melancholy fashion towards the summit and/or death. There are precious few actual decisions to make (Do I use a firelighter now or wait? Soup or Death?) and very little info available to help you make them. And if you do make a mistake, you might not realise until a while later, as your supplies dwindle and you meet The Reaper on the cold mountain. It's not so much tension, as it is despair.

It's slow but rhythmic and feels good to play. It's just missing something to make it great, but I'm not sure what. More decisions, maybe control over the planning, it's hard to say. But I would certaintly like to try a sequel to find out.



Wait, did I remember to pack the camera?

SkillTeam

David Programa
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44172
Free

Sloany's Review

Way back in the day, as well as my ZX Spectrum, I was a big fan of playing games on the go and was lucky enough to own an Atari Lynx. The Lynx was a system that I have fond memories of despite its shortcomings, which included carrying around a lorryload of AA batteries just to sustain me through a 20-minute car journey. One of the fondest of these fond memories was discovering what looked like an unassuming little puzzle game about a nerdy guy who had a fascination for collecting different coloured keys (that were, for some reason the same size as him) called Chips Challenge. I absolutely loved that game and the more I played it the more I loved it. Booting up SkillTeam on my Speccy has brought these memories flooding back.

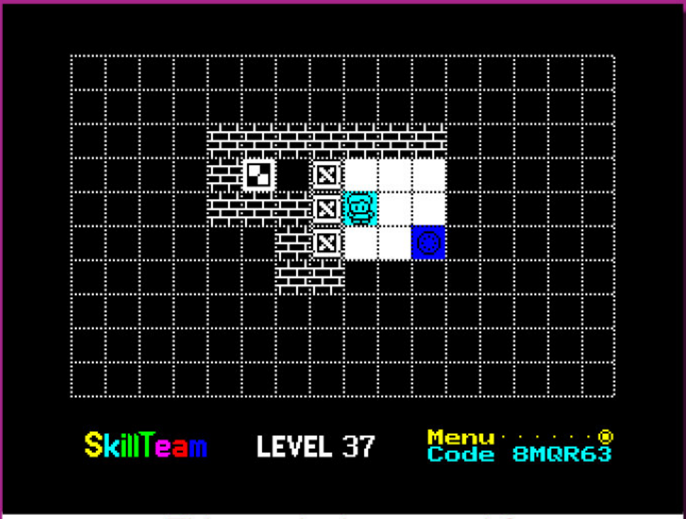
SkillTeam is a remake of a Fancade game by LukaszM, where you have to guide your little guy to the exit without falling into the abyss. Standing between said little guy and each of these exits is an absolute stalwart of these type of games, the good old crate. These crates, which are scattered around each level, both help and hinder your progress depending on the superpower your little guy has at that particular time.

> ***"Oh, I didn't mention the superpowers?"***

Oh, I didn't mention the superpowers? Well, these powers come in the form of standing on different coloured blocks to acquire the relevant skill, be it pushing, pulling or destroying the pesky (or useful, depending on your point of view) crates. The downside of acquiring each power is that you lose your previous one forever, which means you have to really plan out your strategy on each level.

As is the way with the best designed of these types of games, the first few levels really ease you in gently to your task. Once the rules have been firmly established, the game throws a new one at you. Mastered the "yellow" & "cyan" powers, have you? Well, here's a red one for you to conjure with. This is where the game really shines - there is something extremely satisfying about a perfectly pitched difficulty curve that makes you feel all fuzzy inside.

I spent a fun few hours churning through the levels. It wasn't all plain sailing, and I did have to scratch my head and re-re-re-re do quite a few of them, there's a few levels with some red herrings in there, but overall it's an extremely satisfying ride.



This one looks easy, eh?

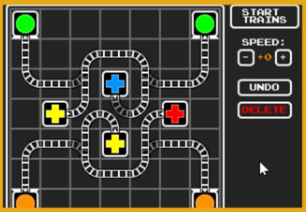
Although the game could do with a jolly tune or two to liven up proceedings, the sound effects are spot on, and everything is nice and colourful with a cheery font, cute graphics, clear instructions and responsive controls. I love the little crown your guy wears and the happy dance he does when he finds the exits. The in-game menu system that you can bring up via the space bar allows you to re-do or skip a level (up to 3 skips) which comes in handy when the frustration factor gets a little too high.

All in all, this is a fantastic release from David Programa and one which I am very happy to recommend to fellow fans of puzzlers. Skill-o-rama indeed.

Prior Art

David Programa has worked more on the Spectrum Next, with ouput including the highly attractive Celeste, Trainyard Express and Bean Brothers.

SkillTeam is David's first game for the ZX Spectrum. What a start!



Mpk's Comment

A charming brainscratcher with excellent presentation and a slick interface. From the menu onwards, everything is super responsive, and the in-game menu popup is impressively modern. Rapid reset via the menu system is vital, and the skip level feature and code system are very welcome, removing any friction from the puzzling.

When writing this, I complained in the team Discord that I was hopelessly stuck on level 10. By the time anyone answered, I was hopelessly stuck on level 26. This is the kind of ideal difficulty level that any puzzle game should strive for.

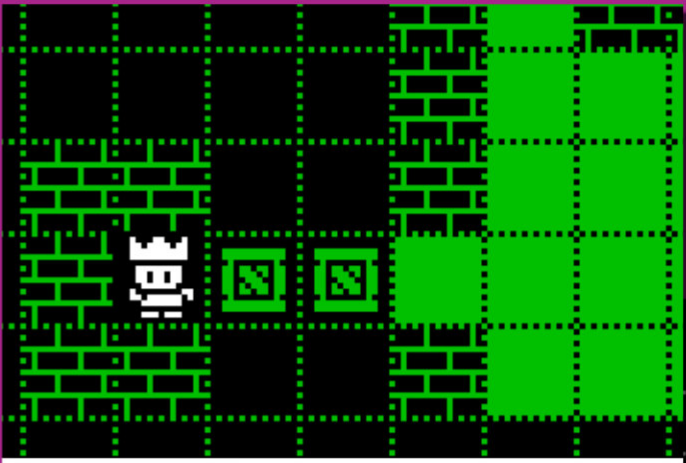
An excellent title, worth anyone's time.

Jamie's Comment

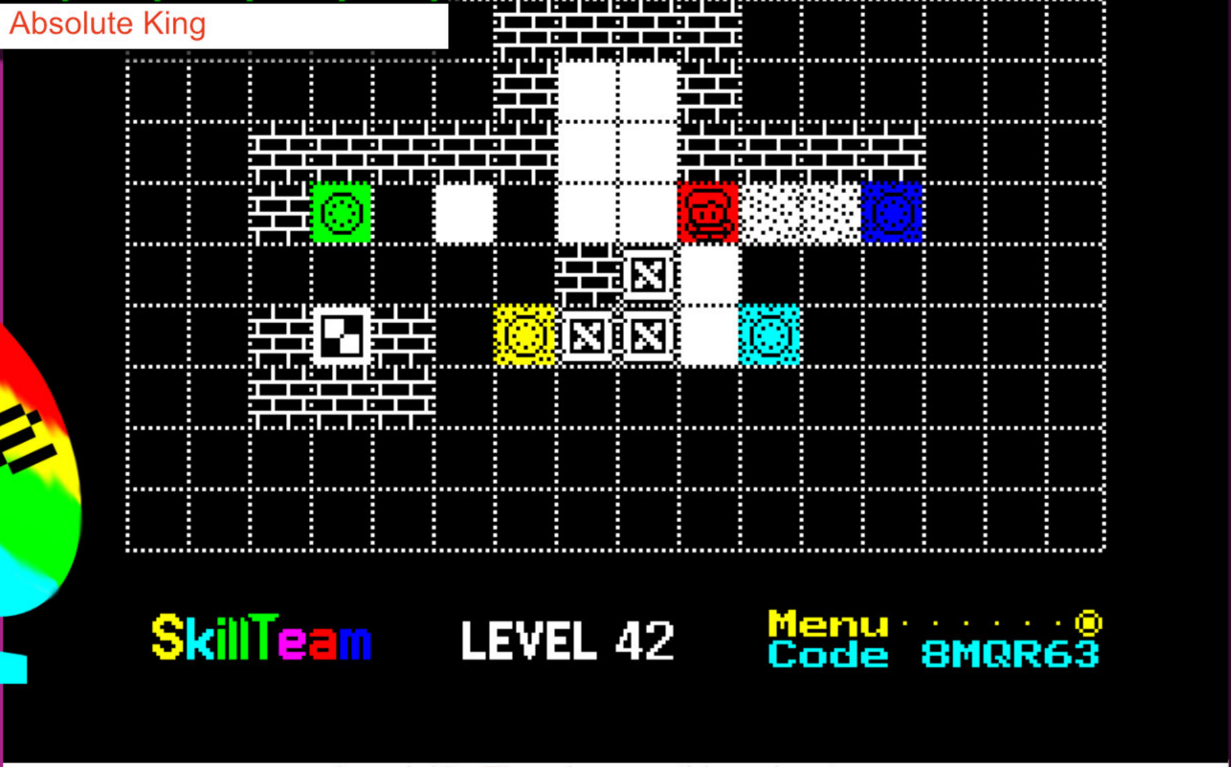
I'm the king of the castle and you're the dirty rascal! But how did I become king so easily, where so many have failed before me? Through team work of course! And what a Skill Team I had to help me. SkillTeam is a Sokoban game with a twist. On one level, it is just that: Sokoban. Push crates to clear a path and escape the level. Only now you have a team of 6 skills. These are placed around the levels and when activated give you extra skills that are essential solve the puzzles. There are six unique skills to discover, and I'm not going to spoil the surprise by telling what they are. Working out how to use them and what they do is part of the fun!

I must say, that SkillTeam is a game with a very high degree of polish and is designed with a modern sensibility. From characterful animated sprites, to an excellent in game menu system (The menu is really good) Skill team has got a lot to enjoy. A really solid game, if you like puzzle games then you cannot go wrong with this.

Anyway, I'm going back to my game to play this a bit more now – just because I like the way your character puts on a crown and does a little dance when you complete a level. Brilliant fun.



Absolute King



Level 42 : There's something about you

Frankee Goes Home

Radical Reflux
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44119
PWYW / $2

Dave's Review

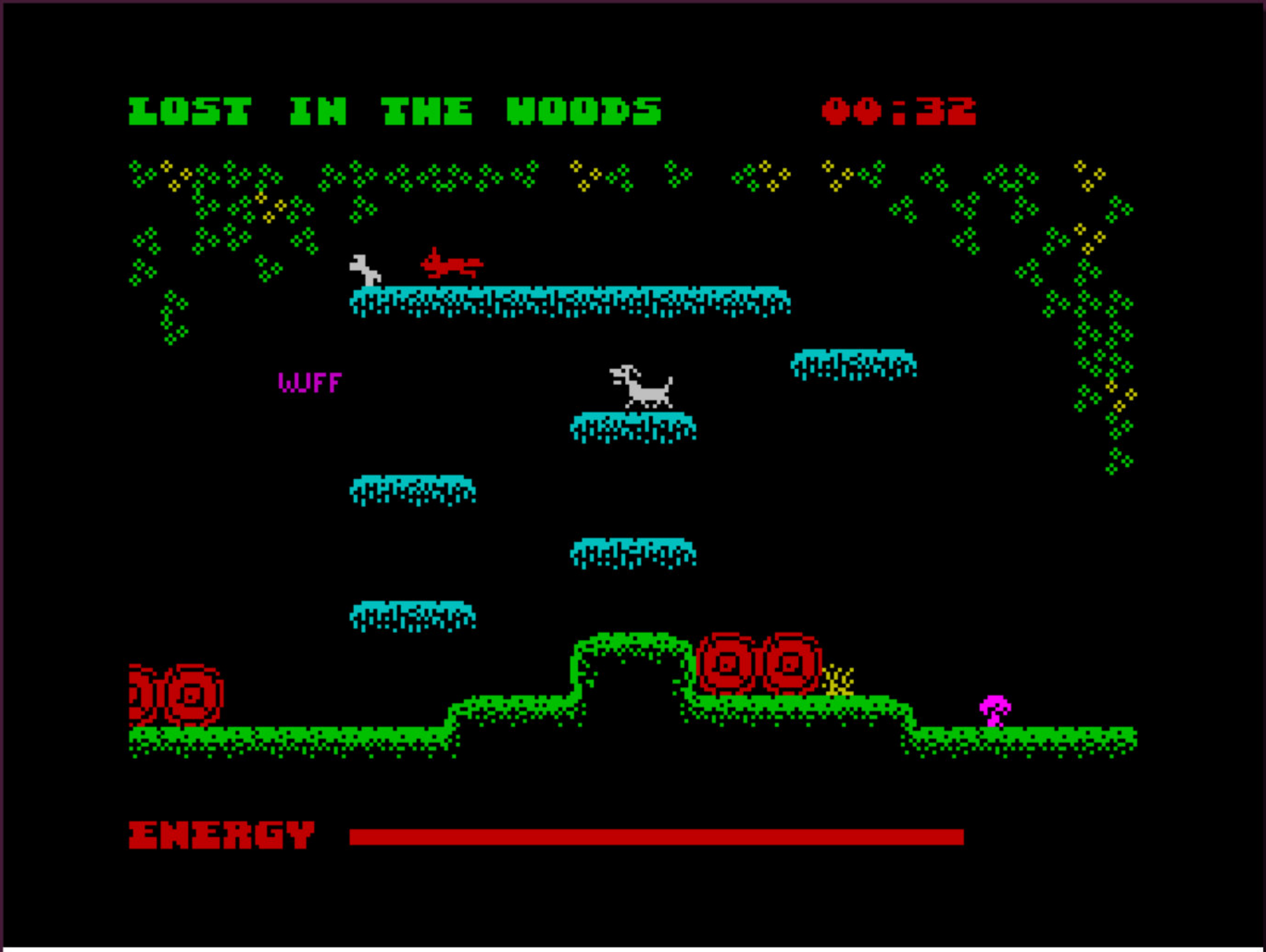
Not to be confused with what happens when you eat 6 cream donuts, Radical Reflux is a new Speccy developer with a promising first game. In this flip screen adventure you play Frankee, a lost and very cute sausage dog who needs guiding home through woodland, cavern, sewer & suburb. The game's blurb boasts it to be an "8 bit gem" and "lots of fun" with "seamless gameplay". Let's find out.

It's made with MPAGD, so it has smooth sprites, responsive keys, fair collision checks, and perfect physics - things that once upon a time could not be taken for granted. It has opted for an energy bar instead of lives. There are two unusual touches – you can bark at certain critters, temporarily confusing them and rendering them harmless, and also dig down through some platforms.

> ***"The best squirrels on the ZX Spectrum"***

'Frankee' is not a collect-em-up – your goal is just to get the disorientated Dachshund home. There are bones scattered everywhere, but only as little energy boosts when you need them, and you will need them because your energy drops when you touch a nasty, bark, dig or well – exist.

The graphics are something special. I've found myself stopping just to admire how they move – not the best idea with this mut's metabolism! There's more than the average attention to detail here. It suggests to me that the author is an artist, not yet indoctrinated in the dogmas of Speccy graphics: things like filling the 16x16 box or treating the frames merely as a way of shunting horizontally. No – these are studies in motion.



Multi Platform Arcade Game Dog

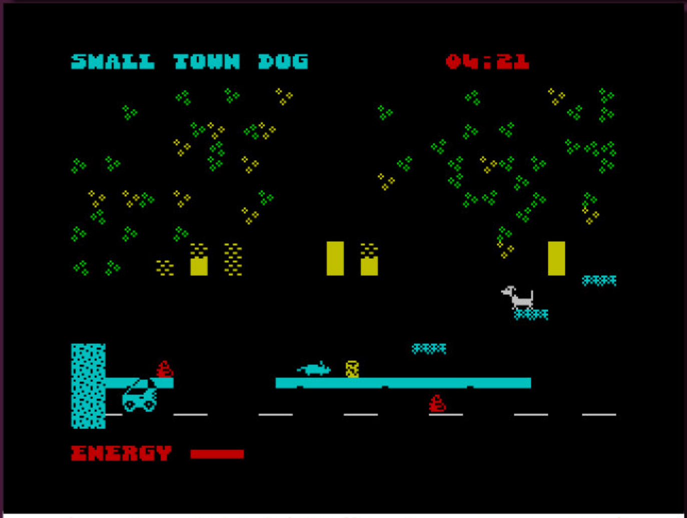
POKEing in the bushes? Naughty dog. 26521,195 No baddy collision | 26068,195 No fall damage | 28971,0 No energy loss over time | 25333,0 No energy loss from digging | 25795,0 No energy loss from barking;

Squirrels stretch, glide and curl. Frankee jauntily trots and wags his tail. Rats scamper. Bats look both erratic and graceful. In fact, I'm going to put my reputation on the line here, and say that this game has the best Squirrels on the ZX-Spectrum. Tails down.

There's no music, only the sound of pawprints to accompany you. That works well though, as it adds to the eerie & vulnerable atmosphere – something that would be swallowed up by overly cartoony AY or obliterated by stock demoscene happy hardcore.

The first release had an excruciating enemy collision border effect, that jarred and slowed the game down,spoiling the 'seamless gameplay'. I'll put my hatchet down though, because an updated version has been released with the option to turn this dreadful feature off.

Frankee Goes Home gets nearly everything spot-on and already stands out from the crowd. Now the border effect is optional, it really can be called an '8 bit gem'. Excellent start Mr Reflux!



See the sights! (Traffic, dog mess, rats)

Mpk's Comment

'Dog Lost in Wilderness' is a classically proven plot for an adventure, real life or fictional. The scene where Benji tricks the wolf in Benji the Hunted is one of the finest in cinema history, and in real life Valerie the miniature dachshund is getting headlines this week as I write, having lasted almost 2 years on the treacherous Kangaroo Island. The drop-bears alone would have finished most of us off inside an hour, so well done Valerie.

So, how does Frankee stack up against those? He's actually kind of a wimp in comparison, honestly. His health decreases at a fair lick, and the life-restoring bones are often placed so out of the way that they're more trouble than they are worth.

But it's not his fault. He's a good boy. Aren't you Frankee? Yes you Are, A good boy yes, good boy who's a good boy? You're a good boy the best boy…um. Sorry. Zoned out a second there. Possibly due to the super cute sprites and the nifty animation.

This is a nice little floaty-jumping platformer with a cosy feel and enough going on with the bark mechanic, which freezes your enemies in place for a few seconds, to keep it interesting. Note too, the timer, which gives your a completion time when you do get to the end, which gives you a welcome incentive to try again.

The theme and the animations bring it up a notch, and it's quietly a treat. Who wants a treat? Would Frankee like a treat? Yes he would, he's a good boy. Who's a good boy? You're a good [keyboard removed by orderlies]

https://youtu.be/E_Ypz6WjdTk

Sloany's Comment

Hey Frankee, do you remember me? You were 15 and I was 12…er let's leave it there Sister Sledge, different times and all that.

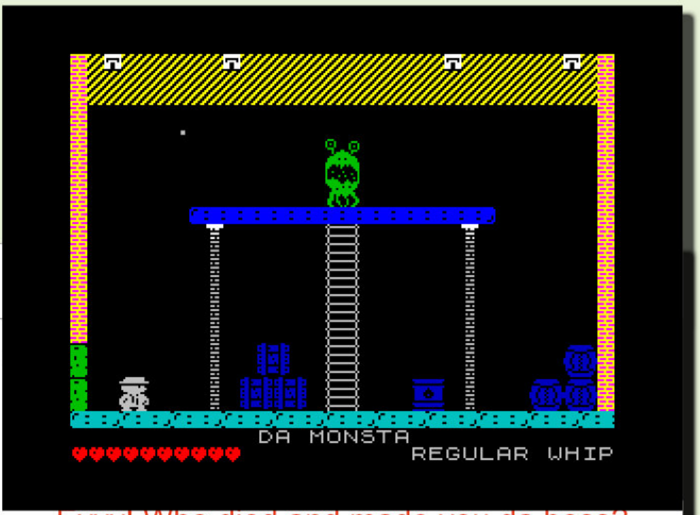
As the other reviewers have alluded to, this is a great game. FGH gets so much right straight out of the traps *(that's greyhounds - Ed)*. The movement is fluid, the graphics are adorable and there's a real drive to see the next screen. It cleverly uses a health bar to avoid the frustration of insta-deaths and the fact that collecting the bones is optional rather than essential feels fresh somehow. In addition to being able to jump, you have a fun "dig" mechanic and the "wuffs" you send across the screen to stun your enemies are utterly charming.

Unlike Dave though, I actually quite like having the border effect. Not sure why, I think it's because it feels like it's an extra deterrent against making contact with the nasties or something. As we all like different things, it's nice that we have the choice in the latest version. It is a challenge though, ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING draining your energy is kinda harsh, but that comes with the territory with such games.

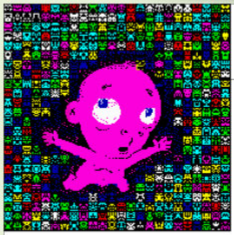
Ultimately, this is a very enjoyable multi-screen platformer, and not just for fans of the genre. Not bad for a debut game. "Good boy" indeed, woof!

La Manula 2

KrappyGamez
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44171
Free



Eyyy! Who died and made you da boss?



Dave's Review

Like its predecessor, La Manula 2 is inspired by the 2006 retrostyled PC game 'La Mulana', which is a sprawling metroidvania game with lots of bosses and a Fedora-wearing, whip-wielding protagonist who is, of course—an archaeologist. Indiana Jones has a lot to answer for.

This is the first full game made using the author's own 'Krasplib' engine, and La Manula 2 is very much in the Krappy Gamez style of simple, fun action games that don't take themselves too seriously. Despite being inspired by a flip-screen game so ridiculously big you could never hope to cram it into a Speccy, La Manula 2 manages a respectable 80 detailed screens, 6 landscapes, 4 bosses and at least one secret place.

The physics are good, though take a bit of getting used to. Once that happens it's fun to control the sprite in mid air, especially as the jump has a flamenco-ish nonchalance about it. The whip action is less flamboyant, but when you're using it as much as this guy you'll either develop an efficient action or tendonitis. Anyway you get power ups: regular whip, long whip, and 'epic flail'.

The ultimate goal of the game is to find and defeat the Otocolobus, by whipping its sorry hide into submission. True to the non-linear nature of the PC game, La Manula 2 can be completed in various ways: the usual route is to defeat 3 sub-bosses in any order, with pathways opening up and being sealed off as you go; the unusual route, if you can find it, involves negotiating the hidden dungeon as a short cut straight to the final boss—but that's no walk in the park and is possibly harder!

And the game is hard. I confess to using POKEs, but I can see how it can be split into 3 completable chunks, each involving reaching (and beating) a boss with energy mostly intact, then making it back to the central Infirmary for a much needed energy top up. Easier said that done, but good fun trying. As with so many things in life, Doris Day nails it: dangerous land, no time to delay; so, whip-crack-away, whip-crack-away, whip-crack-away.

Al's Comment

La Manula 2, which is Spanish for The Manual 2, is a colourful platformer cum questy number, reminding me of the Speccy version of Hollow Knight, cannily renamed Hallowed Knight to avoid lawsuits. That too featured a protagonist with a whip as his weapon of choice. To quote Devo (remix featuring Doris Day), "Whip it, whip it good." And so you should.

It is after all nice to embark upon a platformy adventure already 'packing'. If Miner Willy had thought to pack a shiv in his pocket, gaming history could have panned out quite differently, and poor Maria might have met a bloody end. Though in truth I think it's fair to say she could easily have taken him even so. Monty Mole could have taken grenades with him to blow up those hateful crushers. Dynamite Dan could have.. oh yeah. Anyway you get the point.

So this game is a cross between JSW and Vixen perhaps, but with less sloshedness and fewer bikinis. Our hero's whip has a good range on it, or that's what he claims anyway, and he can jump pretty darn high, so you can happily bound around at will, losing lives as you go, before calming down and settling on a more safety first policy. Good luck to you either way though, as an easy quest this ain't. Purrfect load screen too btw.

Jamie’s Comment

According to an online translation, 'la manula' means 'no handover'—a name that radiates cool, uncompromising attitude, like 'No Quarter'. I’m not sure if something got lost in translation, but that’s how I’m choosing to interpret it. You’re clearly playing as a badass who isn’t here to make concessions.

After spending time with the game, though, I’m still not entirely sure what the title refers to. What I can say is that this is a fascinating, unconventional action-platformer. You’re dropped into the middle of the map with no clear sense of which direction to take — a design choice I loved. Armed with a whip and a fedora, you’d think this was an Indiana Jones homage, but the loading screen features a screaming cat, so... who knows?

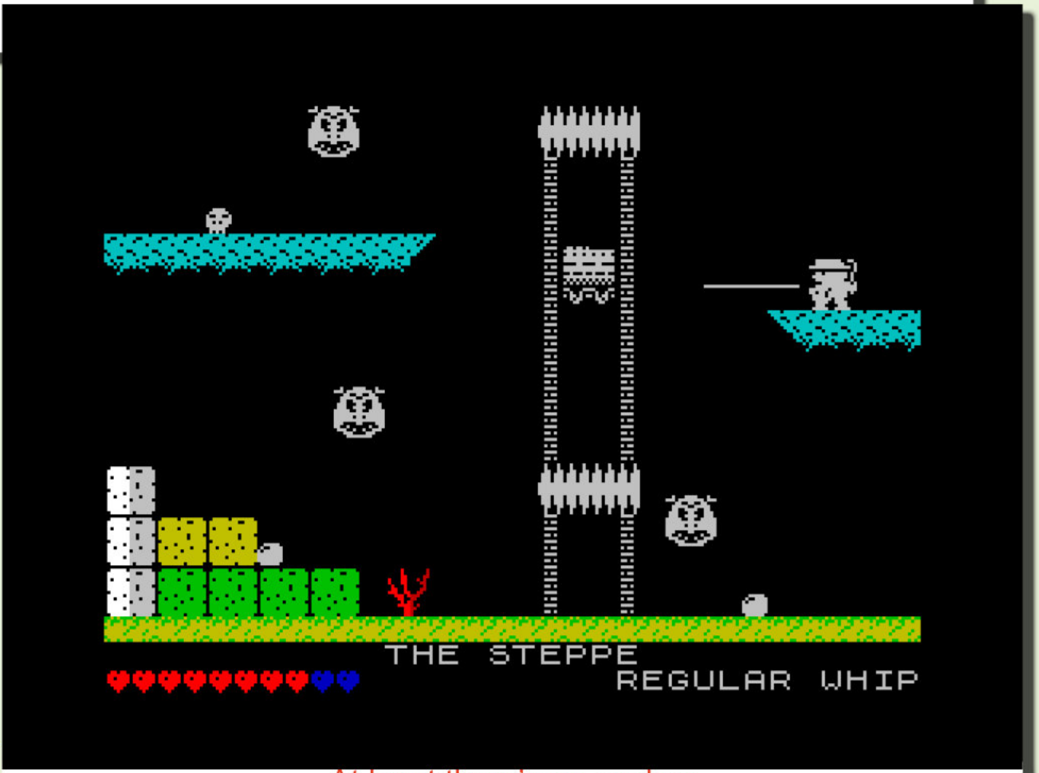
The enemies are where La Manula 2 truly shines. They’re weird, unpredictable, and brilliantly varied. Beyond the standard patrol types, you’ll face foes that flash before shooting, or a strange yellow creature that charges only when facing you. Nothing behaves quite how you’d expect, and that unpredictability is part of the game’s charm.

Like another game I’ve reviewed this month, La Manula 2 features a fixed jump arc and punishing sections where failure means replaying multiple screens. But here’s a cool twist: an infirmary along the way lets you heal mid-retry. Such a cool little idea!

Visually, the game embraces chaos. The sprites aren’t cute or cohesive—just a delightful menagerie of oddities: floating pigs, undead skeletions, random ghosts, robotic orbs, a bubble, and unsettling faces. What ties them together? Absolutely nothing, and I adore that. La Manula 2 thrives on its unpredictability, with the programmer’s creativity on display at every turn.

Coded in Boriel BASIC (with some assembler libraries, I’d guess), the game showcases what’s possible with that tool. There’s occasional sprite flicker, but the animations are smooth and the controls polished.

In the end, La Manula 2 is wacky, wired, and wonderful. It’s a testament to Boriel’s potential, as well as the programmer’s refusal to conform to the now well established game design norms. What’s it about? I still have no idea. Maybe 'no handover' is meant as 'no explanations given'— and honestly, that mystery only makes me love it more.



At least there’s no snakes

What’s this Krasplib then?

Well, it’s a framework for making games like this one, using the Boriel Basic programming language.

It features :
Compiled BASIC speed
Up to 8 16x16 coloured sprites
Up to 8 coloured dots, which could be a hail of bullets, or a symphony of stars
Up to 256 rooms
Up to 256 unique tiles
Collision detection
Easy redefinable key code
Kempston joystick support
Default sound effects (but you can use your own)
A little sprite flicker. Not much. No-one’s perfect.

You can get it here :
https://krappygamez.itch.io/krasplib

Krasplib
THE KRAPPY ENGINE

They Killed my Little One

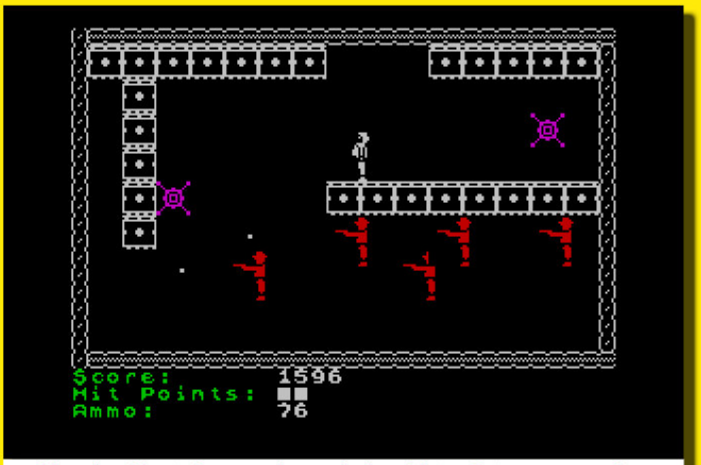
Rozsoft / Piotr
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44098
PWYW / $2

Review

Oh Man.

They shouldn’t have done that. He was retired, hoping to live out his latter years in peace. But they did it. They Killed Brando’s Little One. He’s real mad about it too. So mad that he’s going all John Wick about it. He grabs his gun and off he goes, ready to blaze his way through the criminal gangs of the city on a bloody path of vengeance.

And what a path it is. There are 4 levels, each presented as a scrolling overhead map with large side-on sprites for the characters. While the pre-game splash screens depict Brando* as Lee van Cleef, in-game he’s a bit more Wally Week. Retirement has not been an active one, apparently. But his trigger-finger still works, at least. His enemies are, per level, generic goons, werewolves(?) and goons with guns, with a few turrets thrown in for good measure.



```
Score:       1596
Hit Points:  ■■
Ammo:        76
```

You should cut down on the pork pies, Mate. Get some exercise

There are a couple of things to Brando’s advantage

1) The bad guys can only move left and right, while he is himself blessed with movement in 4 cardinal directions. They rush in from the right of the screen in numbers, reversing back out again if they don’t get shot.

2) Everyone disappears if the screen scrolls away from them. So if you do get into a crowded area you can move up or down a bit and then come back. Sorted.

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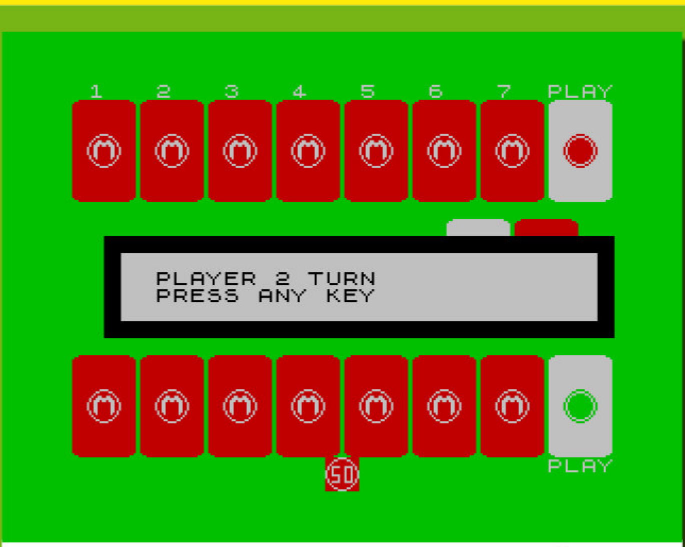
*At one point, the game calls him Brandon. Less menacing, somehow.

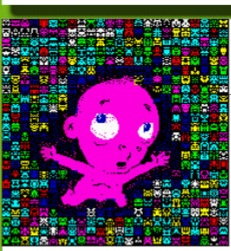
Mille

Tonsomo Entertainment
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44116
$1



```
PLAYER 2 TURN
PRESS ANY KEY
```

The 2-player mode anti-cheat in effect



Dave’s Review

Tonsomo Entertainment’s last game was ‘Jurl’, a hard-as-nails space action game, so the natural next step (apparently) is to port a French car-journey based card game to the ZX-Spectrum.

“Mille” refers to the 1954 game “Mille Bornes”, meaning the 1000 milestones (actually kilometer stones) of the Route Nationale 7 from Paris to Italy. It gets reduced to 750km for smaller numbers of players, as in this two player Speccy version.

Mille Bornes doesn’t use standard cards: there are distance cards to drive; green remedy cards to fix car faults; safety cards to prevent them; and here’s the fun bit—hazard cards to sabotage your opponent. If you ever grew devil-horns and red-shelled your mates while playing MarioKart (and those that didn’t are liars), then this game is for you.

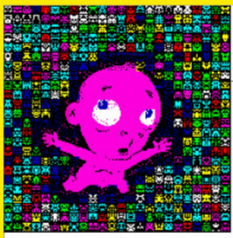
The ZX game opens with some rather freeform beeper music, giving you the choice of playing another person or the Spectrum’s mighty CPU. The main game is silent, though well presented, and as long as you know how to play the card game already, the interface is very intuitive. The in-game instructions don’t really give you enough, and needs images of all the available cards. The CPU is pretty clever, and devious enough to make it enjoyable when you give it a flat tyre or nick its petrol.

Mille is worth a go, and after that, get the card game and play it oldschool avec tes amis.

“A wry sense of humour”

This is written from scratch in 100% Machine Code by a new developer, and is a little clunky in places. The scroll is blocky, and visually could use a little polish, but it’s still an impressive first attempt. It’s complete, doesn’t drag on too long, and has a wry sense of humour, not taking itself anything like as seriously as the title suggests.

It is at least unique, and worth the few minutes it’ll take to finish it.

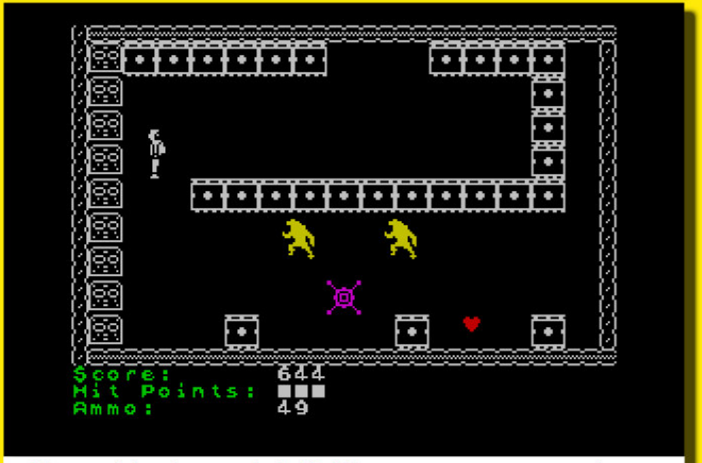


Comment

I can’t get my head round this game—it’s barmy. The melodramatic title puts you on guard that normal rules don’t apply, then the intro sequence sets up a backstory whose elevator pitch would be “The Equalizer avenges his murdered [spoilers]”; and after the jaunty marching music kicks in you’ll definitely clock that ‘now it’s time for something completely different’. Even still you’ll be wrong-footed by the game.

It takes place in an eerily black Gauntlet style maze. The screen scrolls in 16 pixel jumps as you move Brando(n), the bereaved ex-detective around the place. The animation isn’t smooth, but I like the style. He moves in strides that are John Cleese deliberate and Connor McGregor cocky. He draws his gun incredibly slowly and carefully, which is fine when aiming for a bottle on a fence a mile away, but not when a gang of werewolves is bearing down on you. I say ‘werewolves’ - they might be mutant bears, and going by the rest of the game it’s probably whichever is more bonkers.

The game isn’t perfect but a 4-way shooter is still an impressive way to make your Speccy coding debut. So I’m very keen to see what this author comes up with next. And anyway, everything is so eccentric the flaws don’t seem to matter.



It’s not just me right? Those are werewolves.

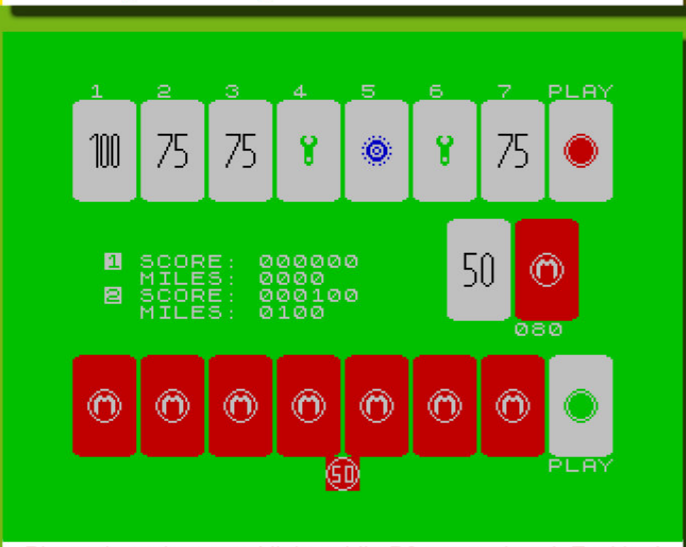
Mpk’s Comment

I love a good card game. There’s something to be said for setting up some physical cards, maybe some scoring chips and just focusing on watching your own cards and your opponent’s face.

Mille is not the kind of game that you’re lilkely to be gambling your shirt on. Perhaps intra-familial pride is more likely to be at stake. It’s a classic-style take-that card game, not dissimilar to Uno, dating from 1954. Simple enough to play with the family, and with enough randomness that even your idiot brother can win occasionally.

This Speccy version is limited to 2 players, which likely limits the chaos somewhat, and most of us are going to be playing against the CPU, which does a decent enough job.

Some of the limitations of the card game design are inescapable though - there can be a frustrating wait for the right card to overcome blockers (red light, flat tyre etc), and one game I played ended short of the finish line, as both players had discarded all the remaining movement cards while stuck at red lights. I was nervous that the game might not correctly handle this edge case, but it recognised the situation and resolved correctly. Nicely done.



Player 1 stuck at a red light, while P2 races ahead. Exciting!

Presentation is simple but clear, although neither the game nor the documentation explains all of the special cards. Some of the icons are clear enough that that doesn’t matter, but not all. The 2-player hotseat works well enough - hiding both card sets after each play.

To sum up, the game runs smoothly without extra frills, and reaches its humble destination in style and on time.

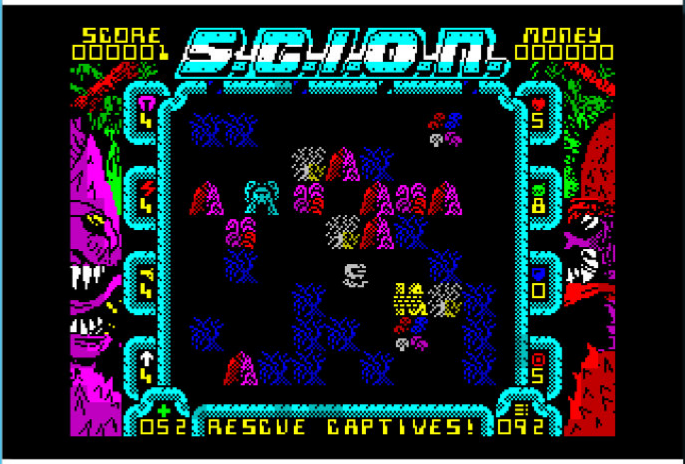
S.C.I.O.N.

Sausageware
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44192
£2 digital / £15 physical

Sloany's Review

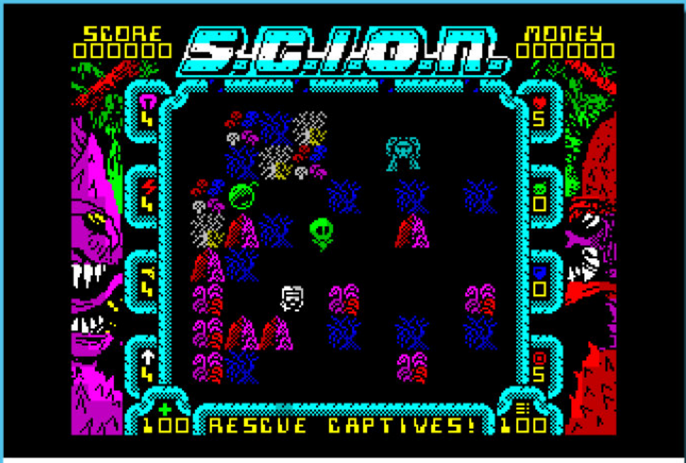
Tom Potter of Sausageware Games seems to be the type of creative who does things differently. That's why when he had the idea to make a colourful maze game using MPAGD, instead of making a flick screen game like the engine was designed for, he opted to push the envelope. Maybe that should be "push scroll" the envelope, as he's gone and created a four-way scrolling environment to explore for Sausageware's sophomore hit, S.C.I.O.N.

S.C.I.O.N. (or Special Covert Infiltration Operations Network to its friends) sees you take on the role of a member of a crack squad, hand-picked to take down an evil crime syndicate known as The Morticians. Your mission begins on a remote island in the Pacific Ocean, where your first task is to battle your way through the terrain & some unfriendly locals to attempt to uncover the secret base.



Captive-ating

Once you've tailored your controls and chosen from one of the two difficulty modes, you're thrust right into the midst of a great run and gun action adventure. You start off equipped with a standard gun, limited bullets & a handful of smart bombs, but there are numerous pickups you can acquire on your travels including shields, smart bombs bullets and health. These goodies are parachuted in during the levels. Between levels there's also a clever shop system to buy extras, using coins dropped by your downed enemies



Someone set us up the bomb!

Each level has a decent sized map to explore, with different coloured keys to find that enable you to unlock new areas. There's a bit of backtracking to be done at times, with some dead ends to contend with. Having a good sense of direction and those map making skills you picked up from the Speccy's heyday will come in very handy here. Your cute main character can move & fire in 8 directions, which becomes essential in seeing off the nasties you encounter

The scrolling does take a bit of getting used to, but it certainly adds an extra dimension, as well as being an extremely impressive technical feat. I'm extremely impressed with how much game is squeezed into a single load. There's even a 48k version, on which the only compromise I can find is the sound. Overall, the game is extremely polished. The graphics are vibrant and well defined and the soundtrack on the 128k version is great too.

Rumour has it that Tom's next plans to bend MPAGD to his will involve making a brand new Speccy dungeon crawler. I for one can't wait to see how that turns out.

Mpk's Comment

Sometimes the problem with thinking outside the box is that the box is fine. Someone's put a lot of thought into that box, you should have used the right box. And so, while it's quite a feat to get a scrolly game out of an engine that's not meant for it, S.C.I.O.N. is always struggling with the fundamantal choppiness of the scroll.

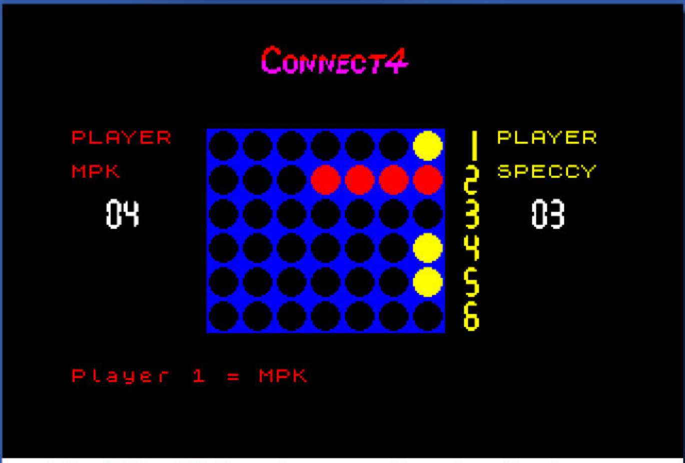
A shame, really, as everything else is really well put together. The visuals are lovely, with every available colour splashed about, highlighting the various gribblies and goals very clearly. The maps feel big, the shop is a great feature, and the missions are nicely varied. It's ambitous and well worth a look, but the engine restrictions hold it back.

Connect 4

OldSnapper

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44158/

£2.50

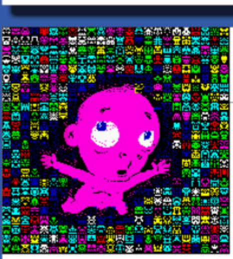


```
CONNECT4

PLAYER        1  PLAYER
MPK           2  SPECCY
 04           3    03
              4
              5
              6

Player 1 = MPK
```

I feel like Yellow has made a tactical error.



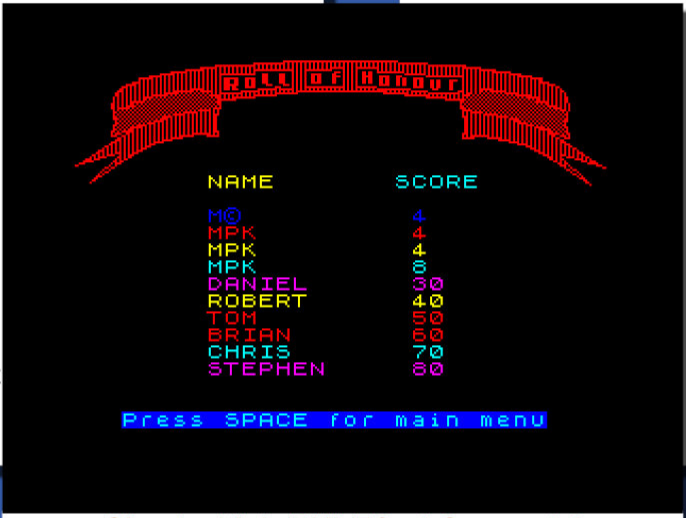
Dave's Review

I didn't have Connect-4 growing up. We were poor and had to make do with drawing it on the pavement in chalk, colouring in and rubbing out the circles as we went. We developed inch-thick calluses, and when it rained we called it a draw. Looking back, I wish I'd thought to code it on my Speccy. Now, none of that is true, but it's an introduction of sorts.

> ***"Scope for an interesting strategy game "***

Oldsnapper's Connect-4 looks good. Coded in BASIC, it uses a custom font as extra graphics for a dapper intro title, and UDGs for the frame, counters and digital row numbers. And that is rows, not columns, because this Connect-4 is a variant that feeds from right to left with no gravity.

So there's scope for an interesting strategy game between 2 well-matched players, which is an option, but against the computer is pointless. It fails to spot the simplest chance and repeatedly lets me win in four moves. The instructions joke that it's powered by 'AD – Artificial Dumbness', which would be funny for a CGC game or a shared demo first attempt, but to be honest for £2.50 I expect a little bit more.



```
ROLL OF HONOUR

NAME          SCORE

M©            4
MPK           4
MPK           4
MPK           8
DANIEL        30
ROBERT        40
TOM           50
BRIAN         60
CHRIS         70
STEPHEN       80

Press SPACE for main menu
```

Clearly, Mpk RULES at Connect 4

Mpk's Comment

Full disclosure : I hate Connect 4. Always have. I like boardgames generally, but never liked this one. I won't play Connect 4 or Snap under any circumstances. It's in my pre-nup, even.

So I was unthrilled to start this one up. The first reaction was a delayed one. Took a few seconds to kick in.
'Wait,' I thought.
'Is the board sideways?'
'Why is the board sideways?'

So I had to read the instructions, something else which is in breach of my pre-nup. As it turns out, this isn't an adaptation of Connect 4, the world famous board game. In Connect 4, you drop the pieces in the top, they fall down, and there they stay until you operate the release at the end of the match and they all clatter out into the tray*.

Here, you push them into the playfield and further push them by adding another tile to the row. This is an entirely different game - pieces move along during play, and if anything makes strategising more difficulty. You've always got to be watching the whole board and it's easy to accidentally set your opponent up, or even win the game for them on your turn.

This might actually be a better design than original Connect 4, and one that you could recreate on real hardware by lying the tray down flat and gently shoving the pieces into place. I imagine. I don't own one to try that - see paragraph one.

The 2-player mode works fine, and for a BASIC implementation is quite passable. For the single player mode though, the CPU appears to select a row at random, and provides no challenge at all. I won 3 straight games in 4 moves, which constitutes whatever the opposite of 'challenge' is.

But AI is hard, especially when you're accidentally created a much more complex game. It's not Go, but it's not Connect 4 either. Can we give OldSnapper the benefit of the doubt? That depends.

Bottom line then - pretty good if you're likely to be playing with a buddy, not much cop if you're playing against the Speccy.

**Clearly the best bit.*

Far West

Antrilles / BeykerSoft
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44148
PWYW / €1

Jamie’s Review

The sun sets over the prairie as a tumbleweed rolls aimlessly across the plain. A lone rider appears on the horizon. As he draws closer, you see his dusty poncho slung back over one shoulder, revealing the cold steel of a six-shooter at his hip. A bandolier of golden bullets glints brightly in the last of the day’s light.

The stranger arrives in town and dismounts. He pauses to read the large sign: "Santa Fe." A flicker of satisfaction crosses his steely face before he draws his pistol and heads toward the local mine. Minutes later, gunshots ring out – the unmistakable report of a revolver. Then comes another sound: a man jumping repeatedly. The noises grow fainter as the gunman ventures deeper into the mine. Finally, you hear a cry of pain – the kind a man makes when he mistimes a jump and lands full-bodied on an enormous cactus.

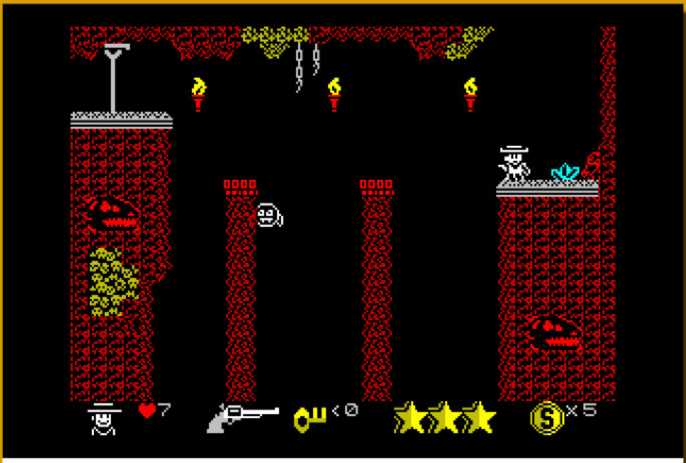
You sit alone, contemplating what you've just witnessed. Who is this man? What is his mission? What secrets lie in the Santa Fe mine? With no answers forthcoming, you decide to call it a night. You head inside, fire up your trusty ZX Spectrum, and load the latest game: Far West.

Far West is a Western-themed action platformer created using the ZX GM Zero Code engine. The zero-coding requirement, combined with the powerful level design tools, can often result in games with excellent graphics – and Far West doesn't disappoint. The world is full of charming graphical details: little mice, deadly snakes, a T.Rex skull, and cheeky cacti all help conjure up a sense of the wild west.

The game features excellent AY music - a jolly tune reminiscent of Dizzy games that perfectly complements the experience. With plentiful lives and manageable difficulty, progress feels rewarding as you explore each carefully crafted screen. The atmospheric intro sets the stage, making you eager to uncover the mine's secrets.

My only complaint involves the double moving-platform section. It's frustratingly tricky - miss a jump and you'll fall far enough to force you to replay three screens. While this can test your patience, it's a minor flaw in what's otherwise a superb showcase of ZXGM's capabilities.

Anyway, where was I? Oh, yeah: The mine was pitch black, except for the glimmer of burning touches hung sparsely on the walls…



Hint - Don’t fall down there.

Mpk’s Comment

The ZXGM platform game engine has been picking up a lot of support over the last year or so, enabling some very impressive flip-screen games. It’s friendly to work with and has built up a thriving community. There is, however, a particular physics to the jumping and movement that you’ll either love or hate. I’m not sure whether the engine doesn’t allow alterations to the physics or if developers don’t feel the need for any, but games written in ZXGM tend to have a similar feel. I’m not a huge fan, but lots of people are, so I’m not going to find fault with Far West or other games just because of that.

Which is good, because Far West is a fine-looking, cleverly laid out platformer, with some lovely wild-west themed locations.

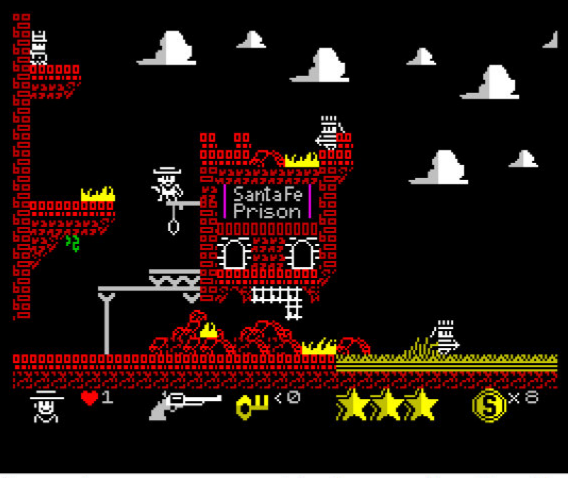
The story is that the theft of some Native American relics has caused unrest along the Rio Bravo, and you’ve been tasked with recovering the 10 golden coins scattered around the map. So off you toddle, 10 gallon hat on your head and six shooter by your side.

You can, as befits the western genre, shoot the assorted characters who get in your way, and as is common in these games sometimes you need to clear a screen entirely to unlock a barrier. Some enemies take just one shot, some take more, so you may find yourself jumping in and out of harm's way as you dispatch the tougher guys. You can also jump on their heads, which is less thematic, but fun nonetheless.

The platforming is never complicated like, say, a Manic Miner or a Throbbing Headache - you can generally see your route ahead and plough on - but there are some tricks to watch for and there's a good amount of challenge to get to the end.

The sound is chunky and practical but although the music is impressive, even rousing at times, it doesn't fit that well with the western theme.

All in all, this is a colorfully and tastefully put together platformer with enough variety in the enviroments to keep your attention. Maybe I do like ZXGM games after all.



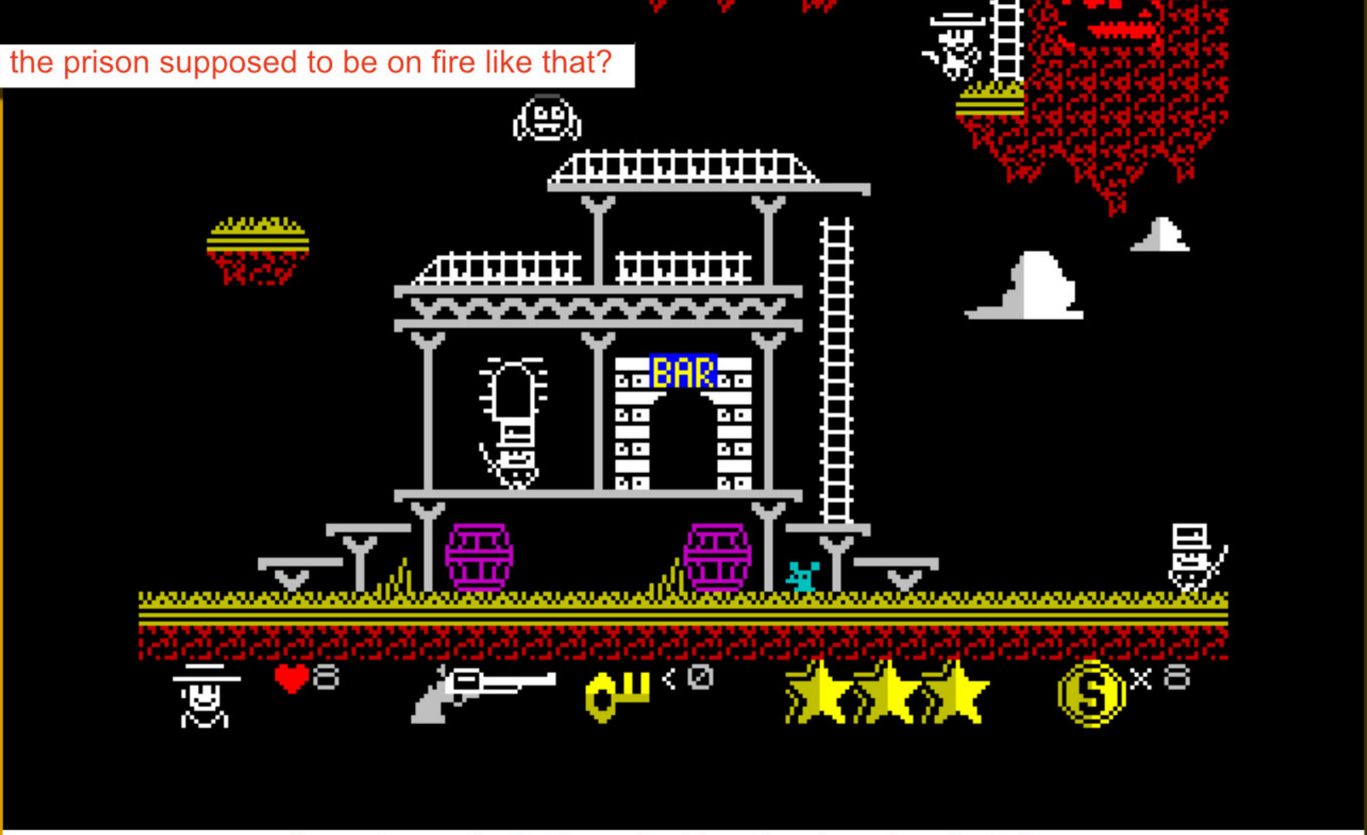
Is the prison supposed to be on fire like that?

Sloany's Review

Being someone who is particularly fond of using game engines to create games with, I very much welcome the dawn of the ZXGM and the host of new titles it has brought to the Speccy. All the same, I share Mpk's concerns about the movement of the main sprite in these games not feeling quite right.

Far West is a game that gets a lot right though. The graphics have a really crisp, cartoon western style : there's some huge love for the cute but deadly dancing cacti here. The level design is great, and you can have a lot of fun simply wandering about, bouncing on the baddies' heads and brandishing your six shooter. It is quite generous with lives too, little hearts sprinkled throughout the map to help keep you topped up on your adventures.

The more I played of this, the more I got used to your little cowboy fella being on the "juddery" side. Was it Stockholm Syndrome kicking in or was I getting over a preconception? I'm not sure but either way it's certainly in the very top tier of ZXGM games, alongside Un Señor con Sombrero, Magic Tower and the Cursed Castle games and for that reason well worth checking out.

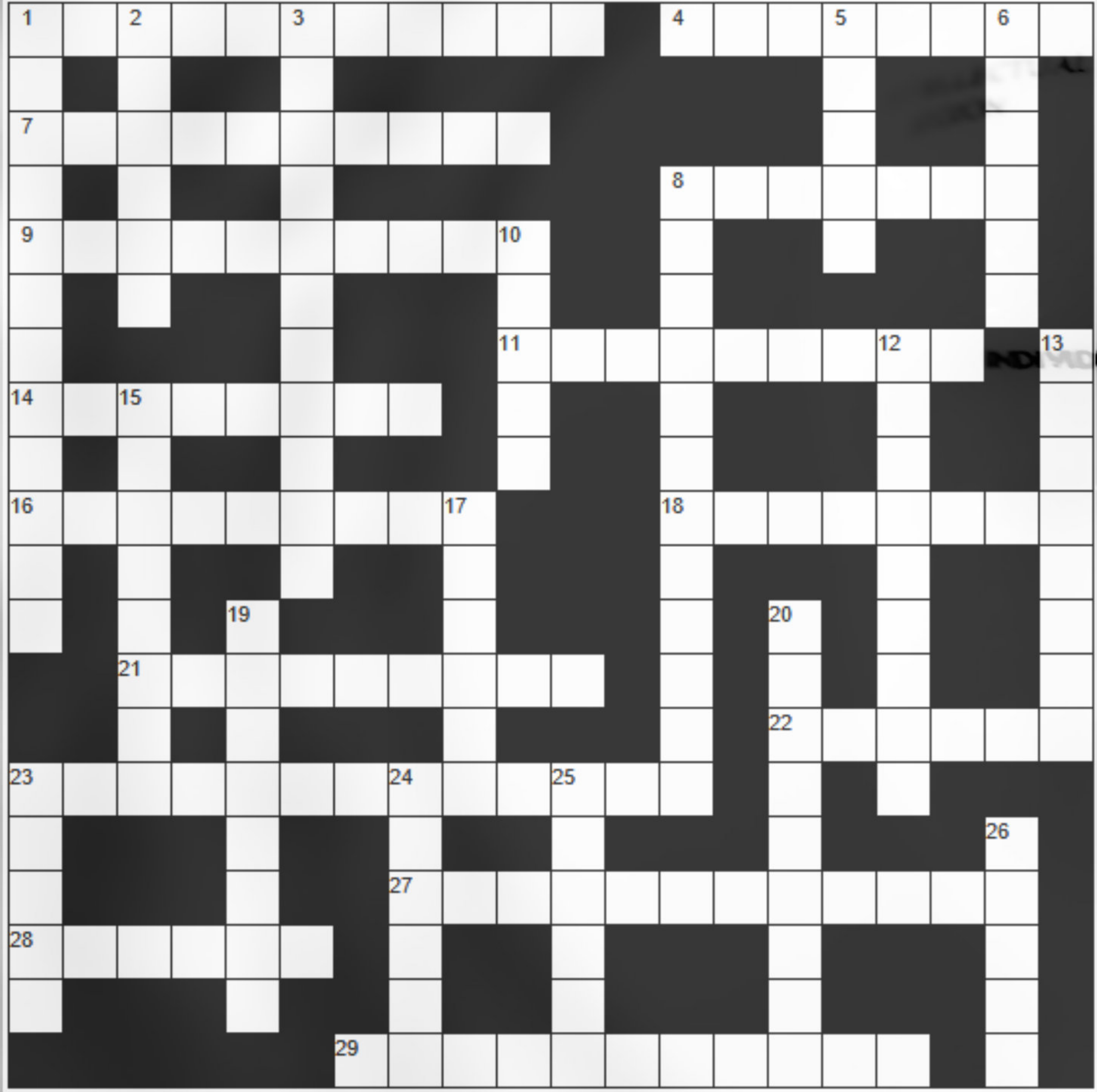


I'm not sure that's the safest location for a bar, but okay.

Break Space Puzzle Ace Word Space!

or 'the crossword'

The mighty GreenCard of the Spectrum Computing forums has set us a rather challenging Spectrum based crossword! Only the brightest, most knowledgeable Specchums will be able to solve it. Dave finished it, I got 4 answers out of 32. Make of that what you will! Good Luck!
Mpk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Across:
1. Shooter inspired by Taito's Empire City: 1931 (11)
4. Commodore and Atari release that had a sequel released on the Speccy (8)
7. Game based on a cartoon, which also inspired another game (4, 6)
8. Decent Breakout clone (7)
9. Slippery side-scrolling "shmup" (10)
11. Early text-based strategy title, re-released by CCS (9)
14. Gremlin's furry thief (3, 5)
16. Alternative to Missile Command (9)
18. Extremely obscure puzzle game included in a 1984 book of type-in games (8)
21. Cutesy 2017 platformer (6, 3)
22. _____ Hawk, game based on TV show (6)
23. Multi-part martial arts game (3, 2, 3, 5)
27. Popular, cartoon-like budget platformer (4, 3, 5)
28. Could either be For Alaric or Of Light (6)
29. Chin trainee? (11)

Down:
1. Sequel to Rainbow Islands, sadly not ported to the Speccy (7, 5)
2. Knightmare ghost had its own cave (6)
3. Czech Snake clone from 1994 (6, 5)
5. UK Speccy e-magazine (5)
6. Jah Conan! (6)
8. Gear must funk? (4, 2, 6)
10. Excellent arcade port, very different from the NES release (5)
12. Quick shot (5, 4)
13. A chocolate bar with fortified wine (8)
15. Mad yacht? (5, 3)
17. Furry-footed Speccy adventurer (6)
19. Early computer/board game hybrid from Martech (8)
20. Appeared on the Speccy as Nebulus (9)
23. Everyone's wearing pyjamas for a Week in Paradise (5)
24. Popular, colourful space shooter (6)
25. ______ Rider, isometric action game known for its incredible menu music (6)
26. Could be Blind or Dizzy, or in Las Vegas (5)

Quadrax

Ultrasoft
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/9403
Free

Al‘s Review

Quadrax sounds like a Hewson Consultants title of old, a cross between Quazatron and Zynaps perhaps. But no, it was first released by crack Slovakian outfit Ultrasoft in the rather late year of 1994. Their games always seemed to look great, like the extraordinary Twilight, but I've not heard of this one. It was re-cracked, or something, just this year so it's high time we Brits checked it out.

The exciting looking loading screen bodes well, even if it took a few goes for me to figure out it was a building. Best read the inlay while I'm waiting for it to load then, and get the kettle on. I'm not really doing that, I use an emulator, but it gives this review a nice, cosy nostalgic feel, don't you think? Play some Human League in the background for that authentic '80s feel. Then remember the game came out in '94 and abandon that whole notion.

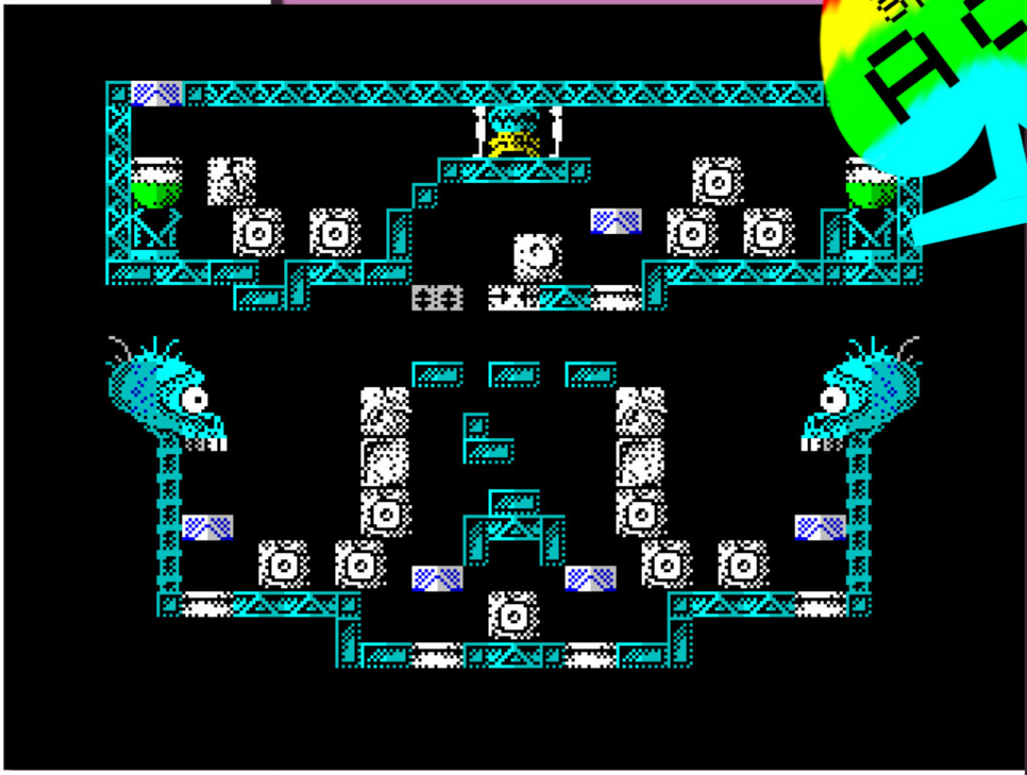
At length a plot was found, and it goes like this. The enigmatic Temple of the Sun can be found in the Sahara desert, "they say", and in its pointiest bit lives the Goddess of the Sun. You fancy your chances with her, so you and your stick man mate decide to go and ascend the temple, trying not to fall on your "ass end" in the process.

And it's a good thing you realised this was a two man job (ahem) as on your way you come across switches, lifts, big rocks and all manner of Aztec gubbinry (did you know they invented teleporters?) that requires you to make full use of teamwork. Or else your dream won't work, you see. The good news is that even the friendless can play this game, as you alone can control both your skinny dudes independently and alternately. That's a relief. I'd imagine. For the friendless, that is. Not me...

Let's face it, us old codgers really appreciate a good puzzle game in ways that these youngsters today would never understand. These whippersnappers with their Row Blocks and their Tik Taks. We're quite content to sit, sometimes for hours on end, in front of a screen, desperately stretching our grey matter to bursting point (an unpleasant thought, hope it doesn't go that far).

If you're on board with that slightly ageist generalisation, you will love Quadrax. There have been many great puzzle games on the Speccy in recent times, though sometimes some end up being too easy perhaps. The complexity of levels in this game increases nicely, and some screens require a serious amount of trial and error before they can be cracked, which will in turn drive you Arkanoid, sorry Batty, before elevating you to unknown heights of ecstacy when you succeed at last. Well, you'll be fairly pleased anyway, let's not get too carried away.

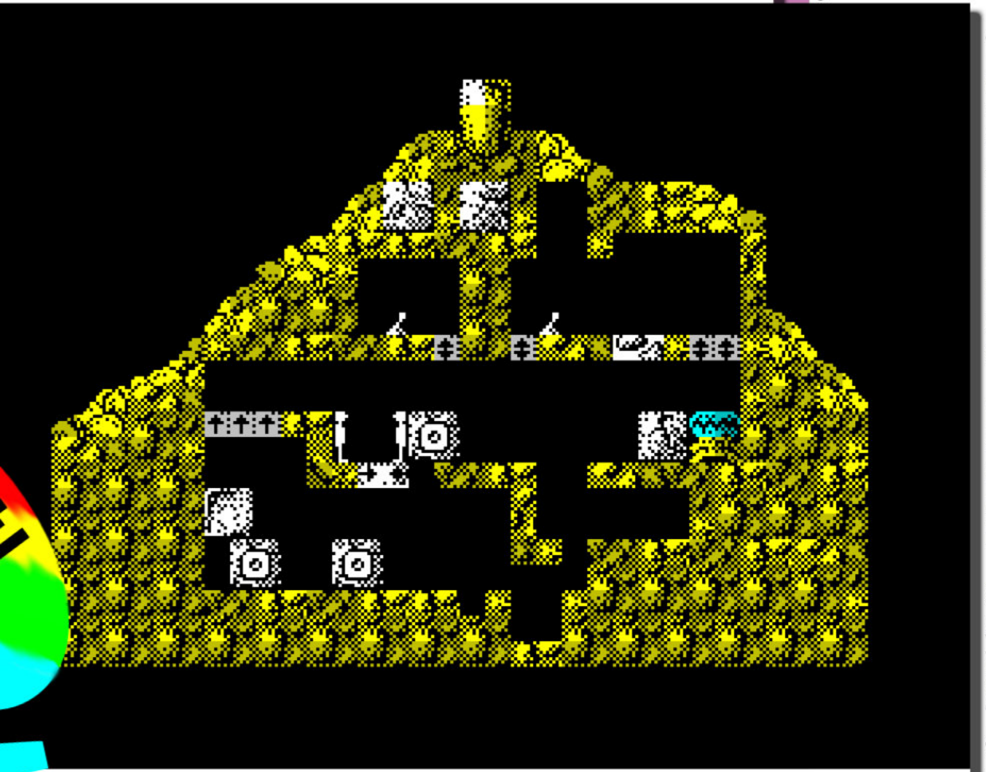
This re-crack (ouch) has added some highly decent menu music and an English translation, as well as spraying, I mean fixing the bugs which may have crept into the original. This is great and a good way to introduce a potentially overlooked old game to a new audience. If I'm picky, which I am, it would have been awesomer still to have that lovely AY music going on throughout the actual gameplay too. If possibly a little distracting. It's a bit eerily quiet as it is, all you can hear is the blood rushing through your ears.



The World Staring Championships enters year 4000 of overtime

Looks wise it's very swish too. Most of the graphics belong to the "simple but effective" school of design, but the animation of your stick men is the real star of the show. They move smoothly and are kinda cute in a way, though where they find the strength in their slender frames to push those huge stones around I'll never know. Must spend a lot of time at the Stickman Gym.

So all in all in all, I declare Quadrax to be a darn cool unearthed gem in the world of Spectral puzzlement. Let's hope more kind folk "crack open" more of these old unheralded offerings from foreign shores, as there's many a funky AY tune that can be played on an old fiddle, as my old gaffer used to say. Silly old fool.



Getting to this point was the highlight of my month

Sloany‘s Comment

If I’ve learned anything from games & films, it’s that if you go digging about in ancient temples, ancient treasure can be unearthed and when it comes to Speccy “homebrew”, 30 years is ancient right?

Much like my Break Space chums Al & Mpk, I love a good puzzle game, so I had high hopes for this one. Thankfully I wasn’t disappointed, it’s an absolute gem. The puzzles initially aren’t quite as intuitive as say SkillTeam, but once you get the gist, there’s absolutely no stopping you.

The fact that this game can be played as one or two player is a nice touch. I called my son in to see if he fancied joining me, fully expecting him to tap out after a level or two. Two hours of repeated “just one more screens” later I realised that it’d managed to keep him away from his Switch for most of the afternoon, which is a colossal achievement these days!

Much has been made of the animation but that’s because it really is special, it’s like something rotoscope maestro Jordan Mechner would be proud of.

One thing it could do with is a little AY soundtrack but you can just do what I do & stick on your ghetto blaster. As Al suggests, why not try The Human League, so long as it's their 1995 album Octopus for authenticity.

Mpk‘s Comment

Well now. This is a pleasant surprise. A recently uncovered English translation of a 30-year old puzzle game? Don’t mind if I do.

There’s a lot to like here. The game looks pretty good, with crisp and clear designs throughout, with enough variety between stages to keep it interesting. The animations are superb, as your little guys clamber about and squeeze through narrow gaps. The difficulty level ascends steadily, without repetiton. There’s even a suitably bonkers storyline.

Yet another game that has me noting down level codes, this block-pusher gives Master Piece and Skill Team a run for their money in the puzzle stakes. Like with those two, I find myself leaning in - peering at the screen trying to figure things out. The Eureka moments come slowly, but are all the more more appreciated for that. The levels feel more open than Skill Team, with red herrings and misdirections that will take a several failed attempts to identify.

If I did have to find fault, it did take me a while to get to grips with the movement, and sometimes a small mis-step can mean calamity, Jane. Accidentally push a block that you meant to climb onto? Then you’re starting the level. It’s easy to do until, but at least there’s a quick level reset option (Shift & Break Space*). If you’re playing on the ‘The Spectrum’ or a suitable emulator, this is a prime candidate for use of the rewind function. But that’s about the only thing wrong here. Quadrax is a bit of a banger.

That's us!

Il Noma Della Rosa

Perpetum / Miloslav Bahna

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/15662

Free

Dave‘s Review

Umberto Eco’s 1980 Novel ‘Il Nome Della Rosa’ was translated into English in 1983, followed by a film adaptation starring Sean Connery in 1986. These inspired four Spectrum games, one of which was the 1988 Spanish landmark title ‘L’Abadia Del Crimen’, so when the Slovak publisher Perpetum released ‘Il Nom*a* Della Rosa’ in 1993, it had big sandals to fill. Fast forward to 2025, and the author has released this English translation, allowing a wider audience to don the sandals and knotted cassock.

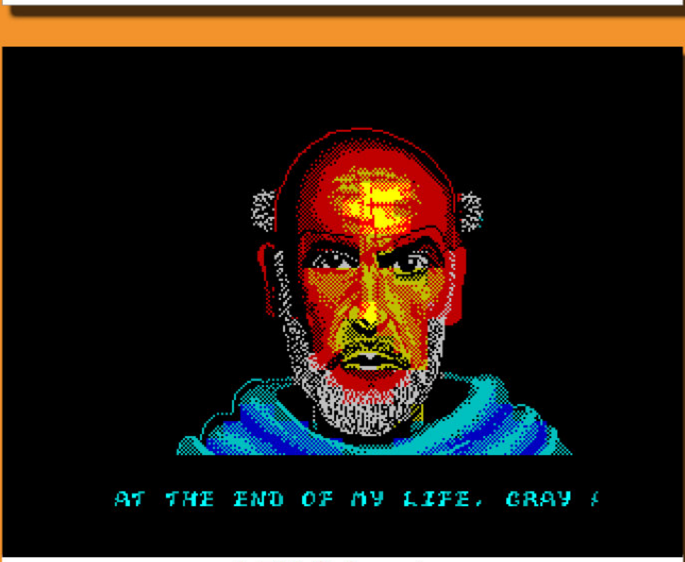
This monastic murder mystery opens with a tonsured Sean Connery giving us the backstory. He’s not perfectly in sync with the text, but there’s a lot more facial movement going on than your average Terry Gilliam chin-wagger. Then we get a cinematic panning shot across some beautiful Italian scenery. It’s so well drawn you can practically taste the spaghetti & oil, though given it’s set in a monastery in 1327, polenta & penance is probably on the menu.

Il Noma Della Rosa is a rare beast on the Speccy—a point-and-click adventure. Menu driven games like this can be a hit and miss affair (the miss being the cursor and the objects), but not here—I played it with rubber keys and I could navigate the menu and find objects easily. The spacial awareness is generous too, for the few times I was told I was ‘not close enough’, I thought ‘well that’s fair enough’.

The graphics are mostly excellent, but some of the screens look too busy due to the attempt to capture what I assume is a well trampled mix of mud and snow. Objects can be hard to see in this quagmire, even with a pixel’s worth of masking. The liberal use of colour helps though, and occasionally everything comes together and almost looks 16 bit.

Just as the film doesn’t capture everything in the book, the game doesn’t capture everything in the film. It’s heavily abridged: there’s only one crime to solve, and just a handful of the locations and characters. That goes in its favour though, because navigating is slow, and the puzzles are difficult. Once you know how, the game can be completed in about fifteen minutes, but you’ll need lots of head scratching to get to that point (unless you’re exceptionally gifted or have peeked at a walkthrough). Tread carefully though brother, because this game has more than one ending.

There are a few bugs, in both the original game and this new translation: some rare graphical corruption, solved by moving to another screen, but the most problematic is that when you put an object down it can not always be picked up again. Once you’ve learned the hard way, it doesn’t need to be a problem and it didn’t spoil my enjoyment. Back in the day, I’d have spent weeks playing this, with many hours wandering, sometimes frustratedly, all made worthwhile by the delicious rush of solving another problem.



AT THE END OF MY LIFE, GRAY !

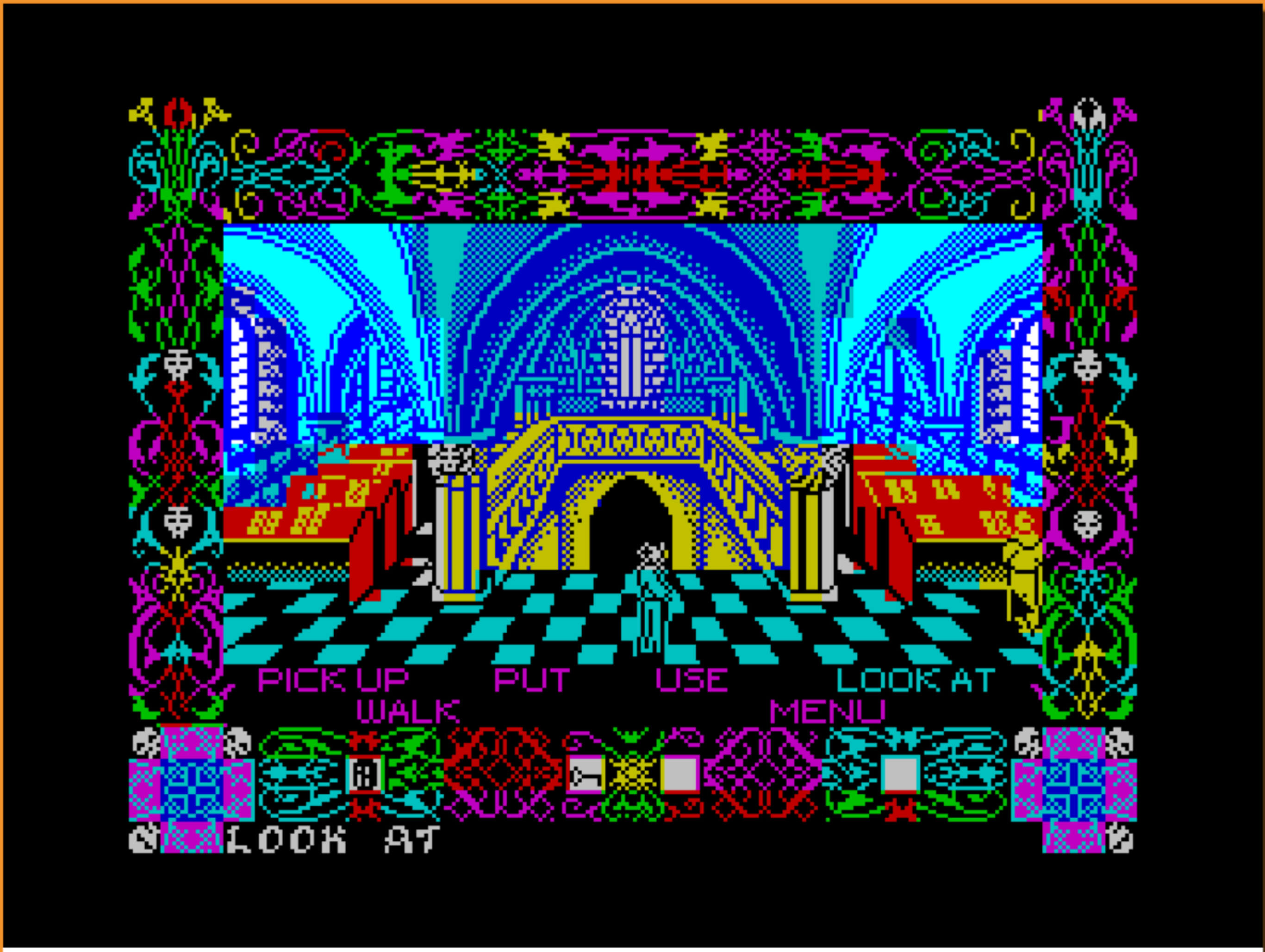
A ZX-Schpectre

Al‘s Comment

Looked at a walk-through? Who looked at a walk-through, Dave? Not me, no way! Oh alright, you've dragged it out of me, I totally looked at a walk-through! And yes, maybe more than once... I love the point and click genre but always get myself stuck, unless it's a really forgiving game. And the older the game, the less forgiving it tends to be...

Spectrum games were rock hard anyway in the main, especially European ones! And this is no exception. But I can forgive it because it's such a bold attempt at giving our fave home micro a decent point and clicker, there have been so few.

And it looks amazing throughout. Possibly too much thought has been put into the lavish settings even, as when the level of detail is so high, it's often hard to find objects hidden in the scenery. And it's a short adventure if you happen to know what you're doing (i.e. not me). But overall it's an impressive feat of programming, no doubt at all.



Where did you hide the Buckfast, Brother?

Dave's gone the extra mile, and tracked down author Miloslav Bahna. They sat down over a pair of strong frothy pints of Trappist brew, and cast their minds back to 1993…

Dave : How was 'Il Noma Della Rosa' distributed back in 1993? Did it get reviewed anywhere?

Miloslav : At first we (my friend and co-author Radoslav Javor who did the graphics for the game and I) approached the major Spectrum games distributor in Slovakia at that time - Ultrasoft. Receiving no answer from them, we turned to Perpetum, a smaller Slovak distributor of Spectrum software, who also had a branch in the Czech Republic. They were interested. None of us was of age yet at that time so we waited a few weeks to sign the contract. As the first of us to reach 18, I signed the distributing contract with them on my 18th birthday. I am not aware of any reviews at that time - the game was only distributed for a short time as Perpetum closed down a few months later in 1994.

How was the game received?

We were supposed to collect our first royalties (6000 Slovak crowns, about £122 at that time) from the sales of the first 200 copies of the game from Perpetum a few months after the release, but when we arrived at their offices, they were closed and were not picking up their landline. We tried a few more times, but we never saw them again, nor did we see the royalties.

What motivated you to make Il Noma Della Rosa?

We both liked the 1986 film with Sean Connery, we saw it on Austrian TV before 1989. Radoslav also read the book and had the idea to use it as an inspiration for the adventure game we planned.

Why did you decide to make it a 'point and click' adventure game?

Well, the inspiration was PC games at that time. Point and click adventures were pretty common on Pcs and we wanted to bring the trend to the ZX-Spectrum. There was also Spectrum patriotism involved – starting the game with a huge animation of Sean Connery talking - that was an almost PC level experience, so we thought. Also, at that time, we were not aware of any other point and click games for the Spectrum.

Did you code the game on a Didaktik?

I actually had a "real" ZX-Spectrum+ already since around 1986. Radoslav, who joined the club of Spectrum owners slightly later had a Slovak made

Didaktik. So the code for the game was typed on a ZX-Spectrum+ but the graphics was made using a Didaktik.

What motivated you to do the English translation?

After 1995 I started working on a PC and as years passed I forgot about Spectrum and the game altogether. It was only around 2013, when I received an email from a fan of the game from Spain, who posted (or saw) a video of the game on YouTube and asked me, if I could help him in translating the game. I was surprised someone noticed the game after all these years, but I barely remembered anything about the code and so I said I could not help him. Another few years later, I installed a Spectrum emulator on my PC, downloaded the game from a spectrum games archive and showed it to my teenage kids. They liked it and seemed to be very proud of my coding prehistory. At that time I decided to do the translation.

It took me two more years to figure out how to “reverse engineer” the LZW compression the game used (I even head to reach out to the Slovak Spectrum legend Slavomír Lábsky for help) and to eventually find the time for doing the translation.

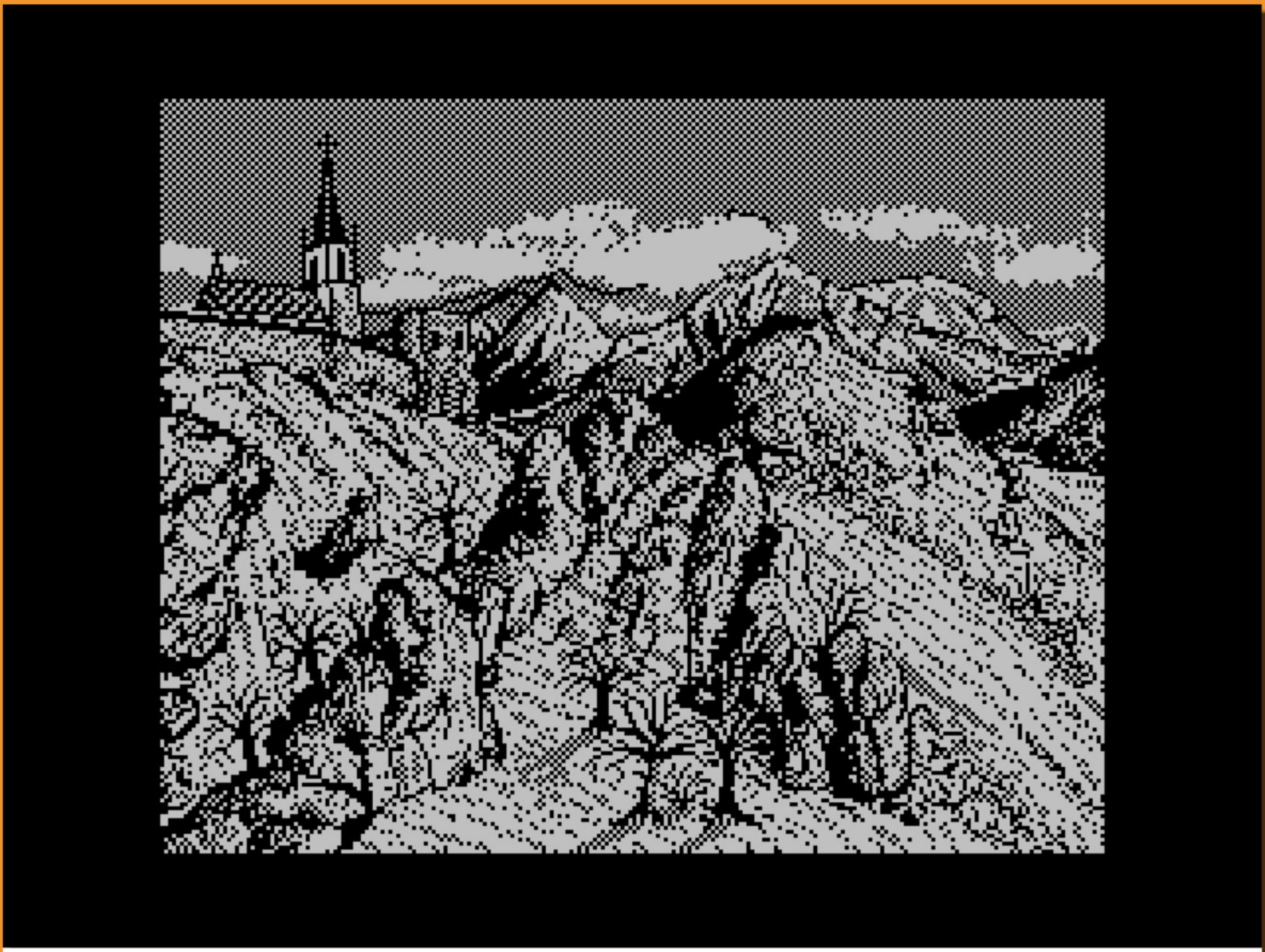
How were you introduced to the Spectrum?

It was the most popular 8-bit in Czechoslovakia at that time. I was about ten, when my parents bought the ZX-Spectrum+ in 1986. I date this based on the memory of playing Spectrum games in January 1987 when a major snowfall happened in Slovakia and schools were closed. Instead of going to school, myfriend, classmate and later co-author Rado (Radoslav) came to my place and we played games on the Spectrum.

Did you make more games?

Actually, Il Noma Della Rosa was my second game. My first game was a Spectrum text adventure called The Apocalypse. It was never distributed and thankfully is not available online :) After Il Noma, I coded some of the intros for the 1995 Ultrasoft game Twilight - Krajina Tieňov and did some special FX for the 1999 PC Adventure Tlön - A Misty Story. Both games also have graphics from Radoslav Javor.

I've noticed a few graphical glitches on the translated version, were these introduced during the reverse engineering of the original game?



This screenshot is sponsored by the Italian Tourist Board

It could be they have been introduced by me "hacking" the original game, I have noticed them on some of the play-through videos posted on YouTube. However, I was not able to reproduce them on the emulator I use (Fuse). I strongly hope the translation works on the original Spectrum hardware, I have not tried, though.

I have to ask: the title is spelled slightly wrong ("Noma" not "Nome"). Any comments on that?

This is a bizarre story. Originally, the title of the game was just "The Name of the Rose" in Slovak. However, Perpetum, our distributor already distributed a Czech game with that name. Ironically, the Czech game had no connection to the book by Umberto Eco, it just used the name. Given the circumstances, Perpetum suggested to use the Italian name for our game. I only realized many years later, that our Italian was not so great at that time and we got the spelling wrong...

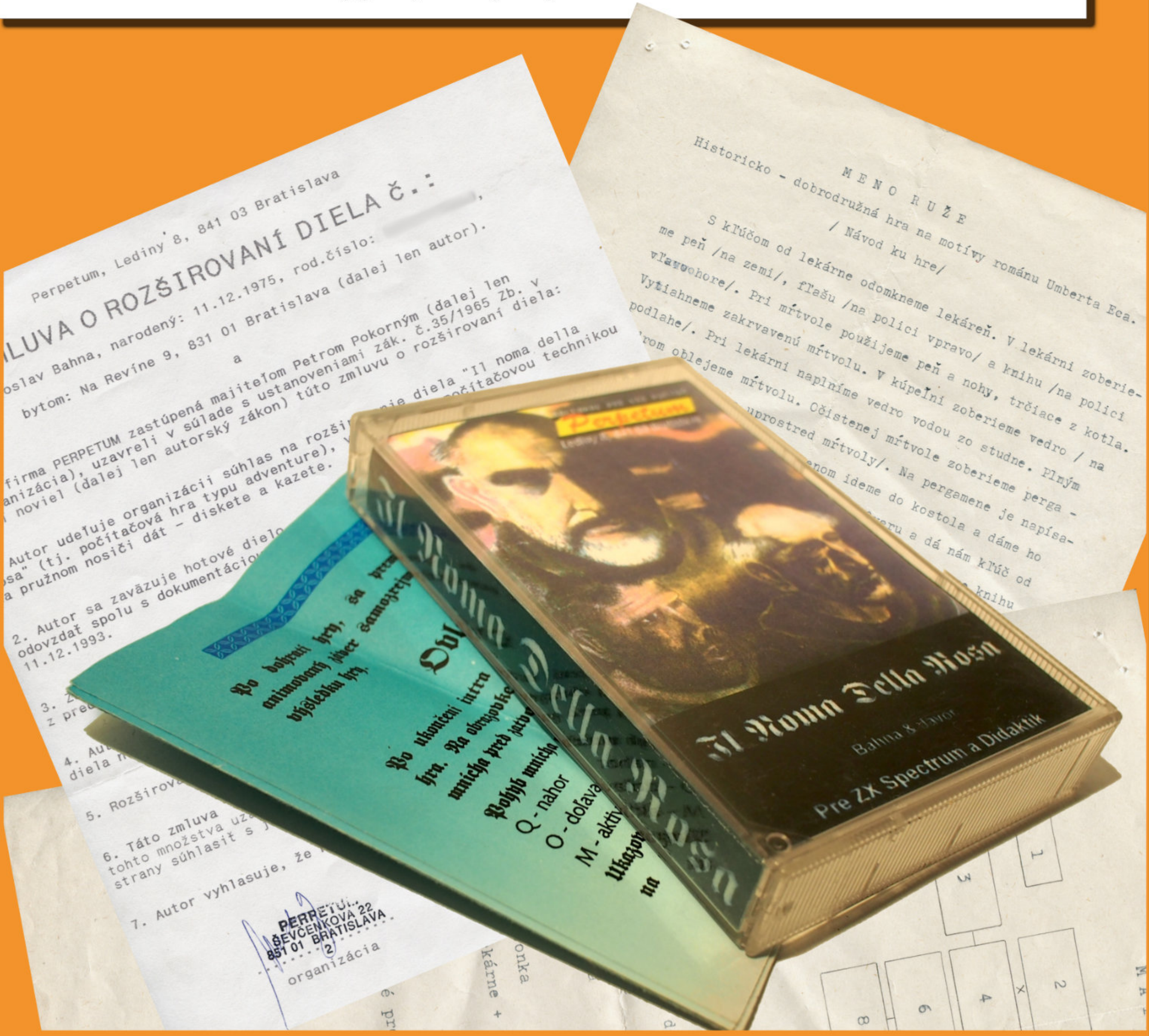
Favourite classic era Spectrum game?

I remember enjoying the Spanish games *Sir Fred* or *Viaje al centro de la Tierra*.

Favourite modern Spectrum game?

I am only starting to realize there is something like a modern era of the Spectrum. I was stunned by the software-implemented multicolour modes in BIFROST or NIRVANA engines. Unbelievable there is innovation so many years after the original hardware was created.

Unbelieveable also, that such a gem only surfaces in English after 32 years. Thanks to Miloslav and Radoslav for an amazing game, not forgetting Noro Grellneth for his AY music.



Perpetum, Lediny 8, 841 03 Bratislava

LUVA O ROZŠIROVANÍ DIELA Č.: [redacted],

oslav Bahna, narodený: 11.12.1975, rod.číslo: [redacted]

bytom: Na Revíne 9, 831 01 Bratislava (ďalej len autor).

a

firma PERPETUM zastúpená majiteľom Petrom Pokorným (ďalej len
anizácia), uzavreli v súlade s ustanoveniami zák. č.35/1965 Zb. v
noviel (ďalej len autorský zákon) túto zmluvu o rozširovaní diela:

Autor udeľuje organizácii súhlas na rozši
diela "Il noma della
sa" (tj. počítačová hra typu adventure), v
počítačovou technikou
a pružnom nosiči dát - diskete a kazete.

2. Autor sa zaväzuje hotové dielo
odovzdať spolu s dokumentácio
11.12.1993.

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tohto množstva uz
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7. Autor vyhlasuje, že

PERPETUM
ŠEVČENKOVA 22
851 01 BRATISLAVA
2

organizácia

M E N O R U Ž E

Historicko - dobrodružná hra na motívy románu Umberta Eca.

/ Návod ku hre/

S kľúčom od lekárne odomkneme lekáreň. V lekárni zoberie-
me peň /na zemi/, fľašu /na polici vpravo/ a knihu /na polici
vľavo hore/. Pri mŕtvole použijeme peň a nohy, trčiace z kotla.
Vytiahneme zakrvavenú mŕtvolu. V kúpeľni zoberieme vedro / na
podlahe/. Pri lekárni naplníme vedro vodou zo studne. Plným
rom oblejeme mŕtvolu. Očistenej mŕtvole zoberieme perga -
uprostred mŕtvoly/. Na pergamene je napísa-
nom ideme do kostola a dáme ho
ru a dá nám kľúč od
knihu

Po dohraní hry, sa pre
animovaný záver samozrej
výsledku hry.

Ovl

Po ukončení intra
hra. Na obrazovke
mnícha pred zatvo

Pohyb mnícha
Q - nahor
O - doľava
M - aktiv
Ukazov
na

The House That Wept

ICreateWorlds

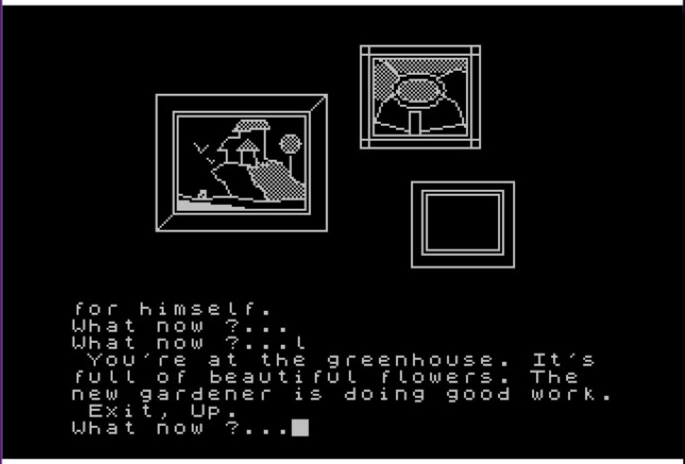
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44082

PWYW / $2

Jamie‘s Review

First a book*, then in 1944 a film. Fans waited 71 years before they could finally play the game! The House That Wept - based on the 1944 horror classic The Uninvited - is the latest GAC text adventure from ICreateWorlds. It's a non-linear horror adventure that lets you solve puzzles in any order while keeping the story intact.

With only 21K to work with, the author still delivers something ambitious. Most space goes to the game structure, leaving just enough for graphics. These appear as framed pictures - a perfect choice for the haunted house theme. They're limited but welcome.



```
for himself.
What now ?...
What now ?...l
 You're at the greenhouse. It's
full of beautiful flowers. The
new gardener is doing good work.
 Exit, Up.
What now ?...
```

A picture paints a thousand scares!

The game's rich backstory takes inspiration from the film (you can read more on the website). ICreateWorlds always goes the extra mile - they've even made an ebook novella based on the game. So now we have a novella of the game inspired by the film based on a book - full circle!**

There are also maps to help new players. If you know their other games, you'll feel at home here (no pun intended).

It's smaller than some of their other titles, which I prefer - big text adventures can overwhelm me. And exploring a haunted house? Completely irresistible.

About those maps: it's personal preference, but I think they spoil some fun. Half the horror is stumbling on secrets yourself. You could ignore the map... but knowing it's there is tempting.

The game creates great atmosphere. I'm enjoying it - not too hard, not overwhelming. The GAC parser has quirks but works fine. The graphics, while minimal, set the mood perfectly. This is clearly a labor of love. Give it a play and experience the original haunted house story yourself.

Mpk‘s Comment

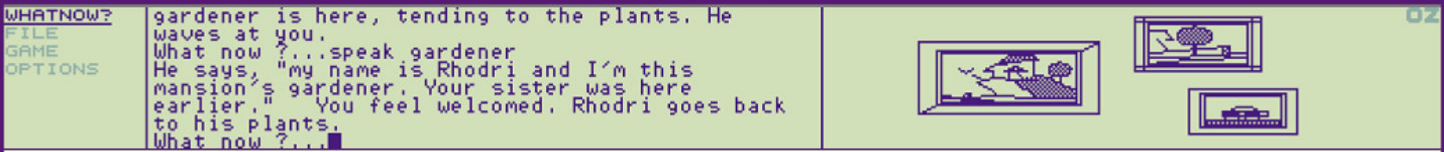
There’s a level of commitment to iCreateWorlds productions that’s second to none - maps, music, walkthroughs, novelisations - they provide an unheard of level of extras. The verb list is especially nice, allowing you to bypass any awkward guess-the-verb moments.

The setup here for The House That Wept is a classic one - new people moving into a house with a creepy history. I enjoyed the openness of the start - you can wander about the house and environs, bumping into gentle puzzles as you go, without being immediately blocked off.

The picture frames update subtly as you move about and are a clever, if sparse, touch. The text (a key part of a text adventure, you’ll agree) is also very sparse. Compared with, say, Erinia, location descriptions are very short, and the engine reponses feel static.

I found a few spots where progress ground to a halt due to odd design choices, such as having to examine the room you’re in, or to examine a door to discover a cupboard. The walkthrough helped me out there, but these seemed unnecessarily obtuse, maybe even enforced by the short location descriptions.

For all that, there are some effective creepy moments and it’s a great ghost story at the core. It just seems undermined by the GAC engine, which is the weak link in a fine package.



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gardener is here, tending to the plants. He
waves at you.
What now ?...speak gardener
He says, "my name is Rhodri and I'm this
mansion's gardener. Your sister was here
earlier."  You feel welcomed. Rhodri goes back
to his plants.
What now ?...
```

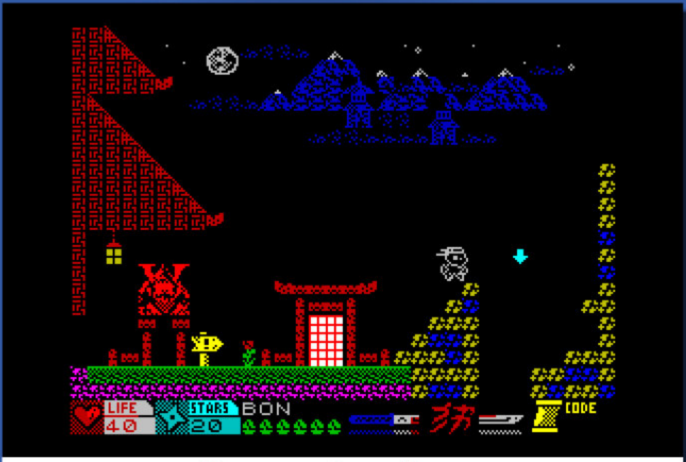
Some might say GAC is outdated today, but there's a cool perk - you can play it on a Cambridge Computers Z88 using Gary Lancaster's What Now? Software, which Jamie just had to try. The result is about as good as I’ve ever seen a Z88 look. <*TO-DO - Come up with a mean joke about a low bar -Ed* **>**

****The author’s wikipedia is a fine read in itself. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorothy_Macardle***

*****https://archive.org/details/the-uninvited-1944 Features a squirrel early doors, Dave.***

Bonsai Quest

JuanGM
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44193
PWYW / $2



The quest continues

Sloany‘s Review

Pesky Invaders. If it wasn’t bad enough laying waste to the palace and murdering everyone in sight, they’ve gone and pinched the most precious and sacred collection of bonsai trees. As anyone who’s tried to grow and cultivate one of those little swine knows, that's REALLY going to tick you off. So it’s time to get suited and booted in your finest ninja gear and set off on a recovery mission.
So begins Bonsai Quest, the second game from JuanGM, following hot on the heels of his debut Bearded Fantasy, which is so recent it's reviewed this very issue!

First, let’s address the elephant in the room : this is a ZXGM game, with the standard ZXGM movement mechanics. If that’s a deal breaker, then this isn’t for you. With that out of the way…

Your unnamed ninja’s quest consists of finding codes to unlock doors, avoiding baddies or downing them with your trusty shurikens and navigating moving platforms as you try to track down the 6 elusive perennials. Rather than lives, you have health points, which I think always works better in these types of games. You also have opportunities to replenish your limited throwing stars and health in the form of pickups as you go along.
The graphical style works well and there’s an appropriate tune accompanying the action. The level design is also smart but it does feel like it gets quite difficult quite early. The “Game Over” screen is absolutely beautiful, which is a good job as there’s a fair chance that you’re going to see it a LOT as you navigate through the game.

A frustrating point is that there is no indication of how many codes you need each time to unlock the doors & the codes you collect don’t disappear or change their form in any way. This means when you are backtracking after coming across a locked door, there’s no way of knowing which ones you have missed.

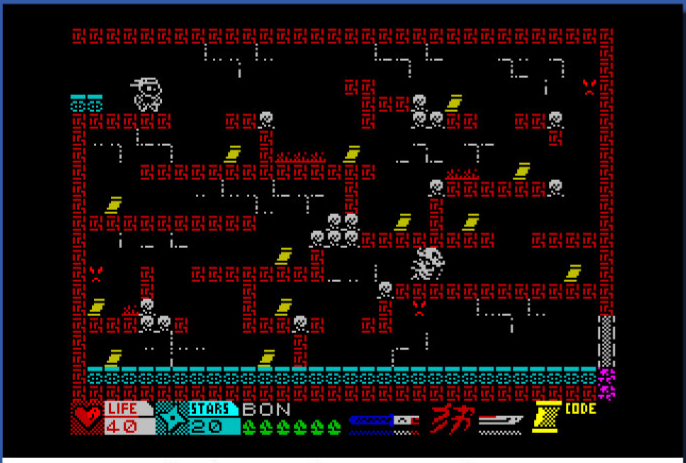
Even though there are only 6 bonsai to collect, the hazardous hazards in your path are plentiful. Still, nobody said it was going to be easy, so if you’re up for a hardcore adventure, then give this one a spin.

Jamie’s Comment

Bonsai Quest works within the tight limitations of the ZXGM framework. For example, the ZXGM game engine only allows a single collectable on each screen. Bonsai quest attempts to deal with this limitation by having fake collectables, or "keys". In reality, these are simply scenery, but give the impression that the game has more collectables on screen that is actually possible. The down side to this approach is that none of the collectables can actually be collected! That's a bit confusing at first, but I soon go my head around it.

I like that Bonsai Quest is trying to push the envelope of ZXGM, incorporating Boriel Basic elements. I don't think Boriel can be integrated into the game play itself, but the kill screen and the game’s menu and introduction are probably handled by Boriel.

So, Bonsai Quest is a game that understands the limitations of it's gaming engine, and works hard to find solutions. At this stage, those solutions still feel like compromises. But remember, ZXGM is a 'zero code engine'. It's almost like making a Spectrum game in MS Paint! So let's not be too hard on it's rigid rules and limits. It's a incredible achievement that makes tinkering with the spectrum more accessible than ever. As it continues to develop, Our plea: Adaptable jump mechanics and more collectables on a single screen would be an awesome start.



Codes, codes everywhere

Rollerball

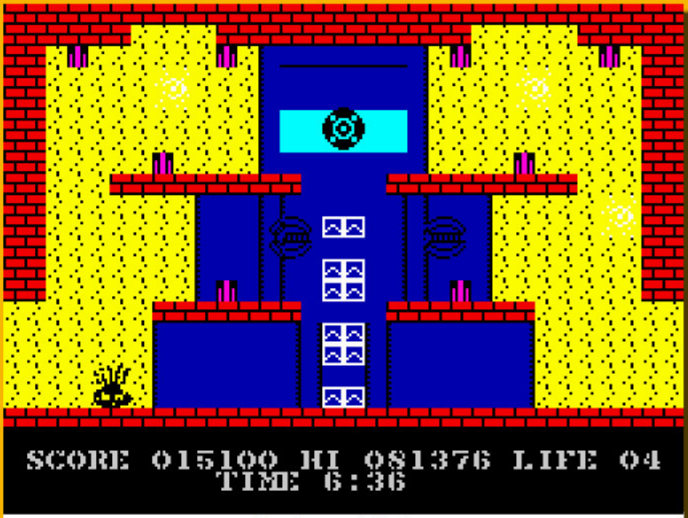
Dvader
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44194
PWYW / $2

Dave's Review

The proliferation of household cleaning robots has inspired a few Speccy games of late (The Mojon Twins'Rumba' and er... that's about it actually), the latest being Dvader's Rollerball.

You are a constantly bouncing droid tasked with cleaning the cobwebs from the nooks and crannies of a palatial yet sparsely decorated home. I could do with a bot like that, and it'd have an easy ride in my manky old terrace because it isn't festooned with baddies and spikes.

Rollerball is a simple & short game controlled with two keys, leaving the player's other hand free to read an improving book or eat wholefoods. The perpetual bounce does make it a challenge though. Just jumping over a horizontal nasty takes planning—not so easy when you're contemplating Ulysses with a mouthful of figs.



Before ULA+

There are screens where I suspect it's impossible to clean all the cobwebs without losing a life, though maybe I'm the issue, and like a fat-eared rugby pundit I'm blaming everything on 'the bounce of the ball'. So while you do get a generous 8 lives, 10 minutes, and cleaning the cobwebs is merely optional, I'd be impressed if you completed it on your first go.

Rollerball gets the essentials of gameplay right, but there's room for improvement. It's not the easiest game on the eye - the dappled backgrounds clash and you rarely see the complete sprite.

Mieyen

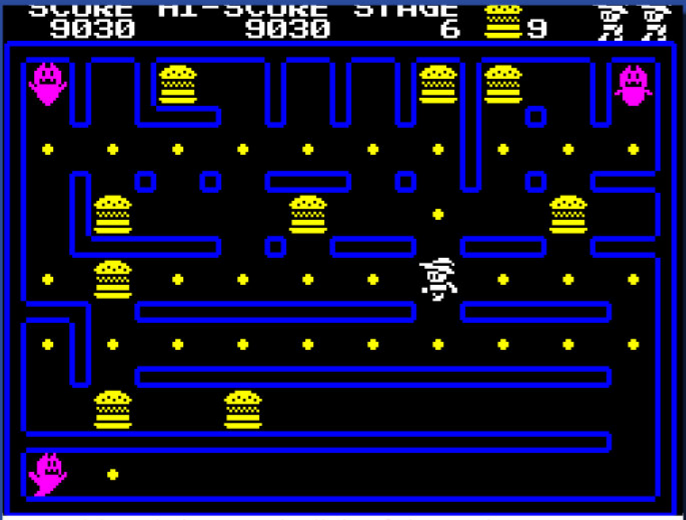
Inufuto
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44022
Free

Mpk's Review

Every so often, when you're thinking about a video game, you're faced with a particular problem. The problem I'm referring to is this one : The game has a mechanic which you've not seen before. But you don't know whether it's original. If you get all excited, and it turns out that it's ripped off from some 80s classic that you never got around to, then all the cool kids will laugh at you. But if you play it down, the cool kids all think you're a fool who doesn't recognise genius.

Thus, I am taking on a gamble here. Mieyen has a fantastic mechanic that I've never seen before in a similar game, and I think it's genius. Yes, it looks like a dodgy Pacman, and yes, it has those same Ghost-Cats that Inufuto puts in all their games. But hear me out...

In Mieyen, you're in a Pacman-style maze, with scary ghosts that will kill you, and eat your precious burgers. But! You can blast out a fiery ball that will incinerate them. You just need to get rid of all the ghosts to clear the level. This sounds easy, and it is, except for that mechanic I was talking about. Which is this :
The ghosts are invisible.



Yes, I do need all 9 of those burgers.

You can track them roughly by the dots that are extinguished as the ghosts move across them. This generally means that they are easy to intercept at the start of a level, when their progress is obvious, but after you focus on one and the others have cleared out the dots from an area, their presence is undetectable. You can reignite

POKEaBall : X lives: 28564,X Infinite Lives: 28688,0

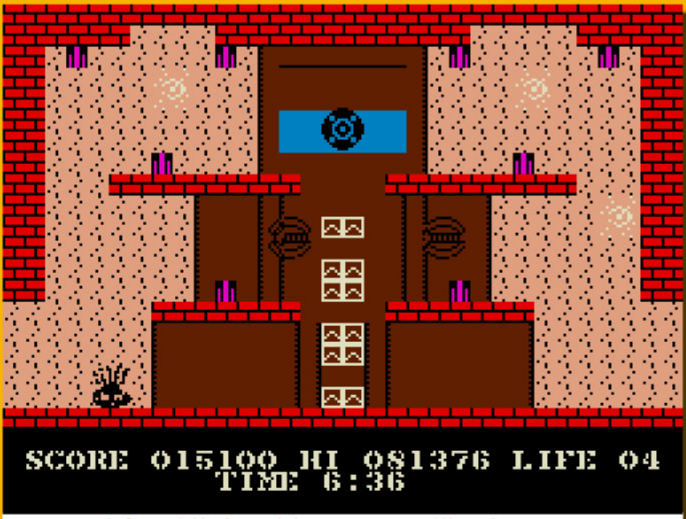
On a normal Speccy, some of the colour combinations are brave, verging on gaudy; this is because it takes advantage of MPAGD's easy access to the extra colours of ULA+. The against-the-clock thrill would be enhanced with some AY music.
This is the author's first game, and on release they expressed reservations about its quality. Such concerns were unwarranted, because Rollerball has rightly been well-received. It's an addictive hi-score challenge that I keep returning to, trying to shave seconds off my time with marginal and not-so-marginal gains. At the time of writing: 4 mins 54 sec, 51 cobwebs, final score 81376. BEAT THAT!

Sloany's Comment

Once I got over my initial disappointment that this wasn't based on the 1975 dystopian classic film I had a lot of fun with Dvader's debut Spectrum game.

Its simplicity is its strength, with the only controls being bounce left or bounce right, it leaves you free to focus on the one thing that matters, timing.
It's so much fun bouncing about and isn't fun what it's all about? It is a very completable game, so the fun lies in chasing that high score & trimming precious seconds off your time. I'll not say what my high score is at this point though, suffice to say its lower than Dave's...for now!

Being a debut game, it is a little rough around the edges but there's no denying its charm. With a bit of spit & polish it could be an total corker. I'm looking forward to future Dvader games, especially if they are as fun as this.



After ULA+. I hope you like brown.

Sloany's Comment

Well, if it's any comfort to my esteemed colleague, I have to admit I've never seen a mechanic like this before, and I've played more single screen maze games than you could shake a QuickShot II at. I have to say that it certainly freshens up the "move round a maze avoiding baddies" formula and I had some fun with this.

The first few levels are pretty elementary and can be breezed through without too much trauma, which eases you into the strange new mechanic. To compliment the fairly straightforward gameplay, the 48k tune & effects fit the game nicely and the whole thing has a professional sheen to it. If you're a fan of this sort of thing, (and let's face it you should really know if you are or not by now!) then you won't be disappointed.

the dots by walking over an empty space, but moving into empty areas is risky. Genius, like I said.

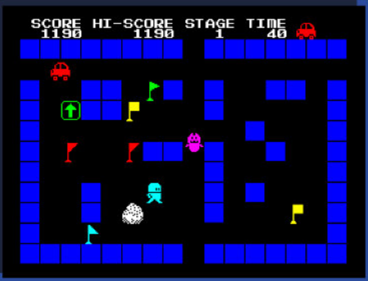
Genius that is let down a little by the implementation, unfortunately. The engine is a little bit clunky, with blocky movement and the sound could certainly use some attention. There aren't enough levels, with play looping rather too quickly to keep your interest in the long-term. But while it's fresh, there's a real sense of tension as you tiptoe through the darkened maze, blasting off speculative fireballs. Paws off my burgers, ghost-cats!

Prior Art

The enigmatic Inufuto has 18 titles in ZXDB. I count 11 of them that feature Ghost Cats.

Notably, they release their 8 bit games to > 100 different platforms, most of which I've never heard of. Want to play Mieyen on your Aquarius 32 or Game.com? Go ahead!

Check out Yewdow from 2023, an action-puzzler with traces of Chu Chu Rocket.



Plyuk

Retrosouls
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44065
PWYW / $2

Review

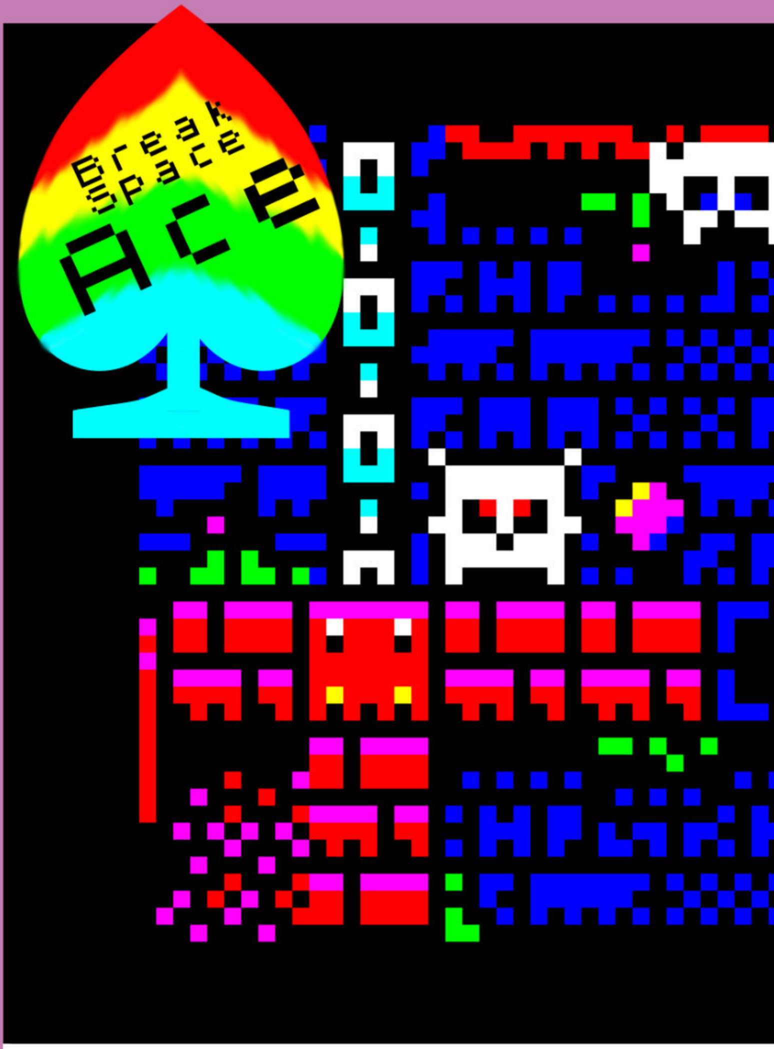
There are some technical demos that blow my mind. Bad Apple on the Spectrum, Batman Forever on the CPC and the animated 3D head demo for the QL from 1986 all spring to mind as impressive visual displays of what the respective hardware was capable of producing. Such demos often work by exploiting every last drop of hardware power available. They are not games, but rather animations. I've often watched them and thought – wow, if only this could be game, that would be amazing!

The brings me to Plyuk, a new game by Retrosouls. The game is visually jaw dropping. It is a technical tour de force and has much of the wow factor of a technical demo, but the really impressive part is that this is more than a demo. Plyuk is a fully fledged, highly polished game. Its graphics will have you scratching your head and saying how could this be possible on the humble spectrum?

As much as we adore the Speccy, we all know its graphical limitations: Colour clash, the 2 colours per attribute compromise, and no hardware scrolling means most games are limited to either 'flip screen' or monochrome graphics. Through use of a clever engine that divides the screen in to a grid of 4x4 pixel squares, which also makes use of 'multicolour' effects, Plyuk seems to deliver the impossible. Fluid scrolling and fast paced puzzle platforming action. An incredible feat that must be played to be fully appreciated.

But surely all this comes with compromises? Surely Plyuk can't have its cake and eat it, can it? Well no, it doesn't, not quite. The game itself starts off a little too slow for my liking. I would rather dive into some serious challenge from the beginning. But the first 10 of the 25 levels are very straightforward and too simple. After level 10 the games gets a little more demanding, and the last half of the game is where I found the sweet spot for difficulty and creativity.

Plyuk gives you infinite lives and you can press R to restart a level if you get stuck (which you will). The game encourages trial and error. Run around and die a number of times while you work out the correct route before making your final attempt. There were two levels that pushed this concept into frustration for me. It is very easy to move too far in one direction and get stuck. Some of the later levels require a precision that the games engine does not support. This, my only real gripe, is obviously an issue developers are aware of: Retrosouls have released an updated version of Plyuk with a keyboard debounce routine, although I haven't tried it.



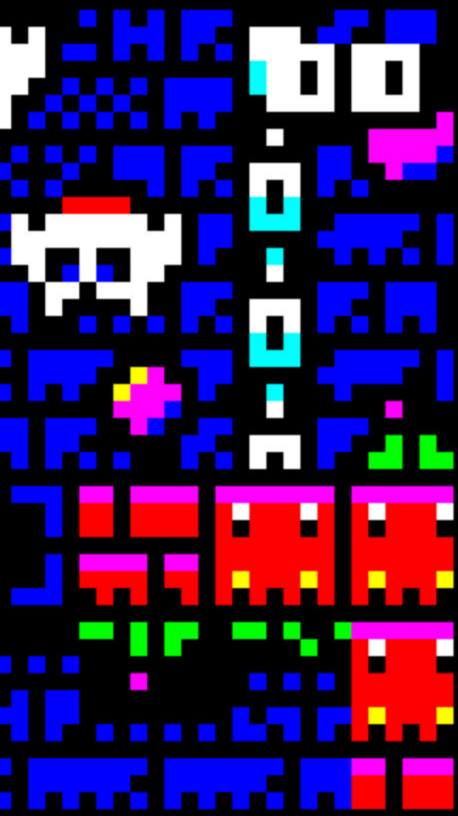
A spooky chain of events

Even with my debounce issue, I was able to complete all 25 levels and the experience is very satisfying. The game contains a number of exquisite cutscenes that describe the games story line, and there is even a credits screen with butter smooth scrolling at the end. Everything has been exquisitely thought through and executed to the highest standard. This is more than an impressive technical demo, it's a great game to boot.

Al's Comment

Aargh what the heck's happened to my TV? It's covered in big, colourful squares flashing on and off! The sort of thing which back in 1986 would have had me begging my dad to take me to Microsnips in Wallasey to get my awesome, if fairly breakable 48k Speccy fixed yet again. Surely in this day and age such things shouldn't happen!

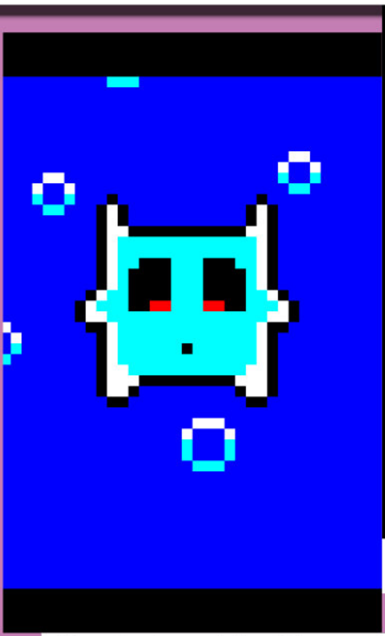
Hold on there, on closer inspection these colourful blocks are rather pretty. And the machine is emitting pleasant sounds, so maybe all is well.

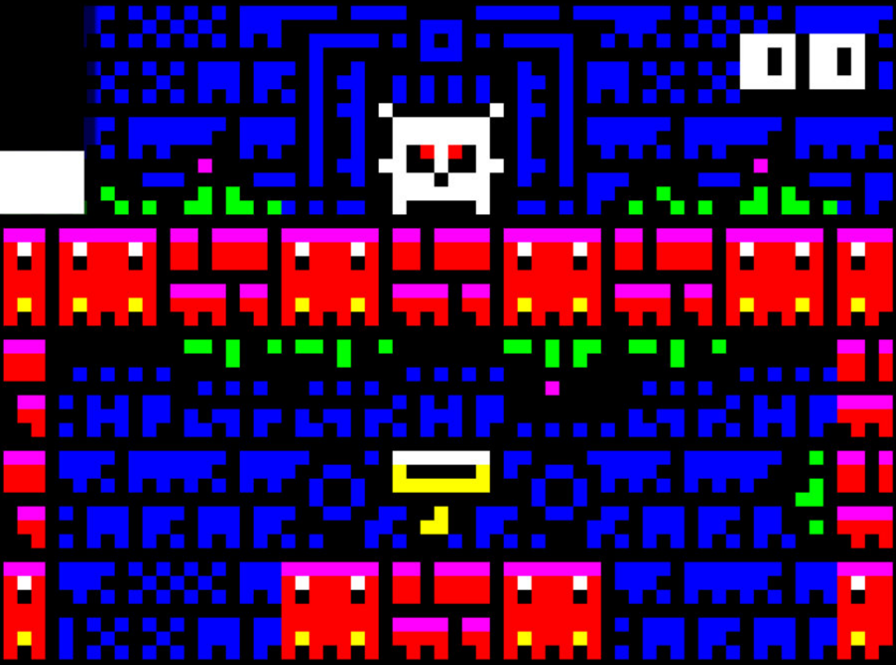


Mpk's Comment

This both looks and moves unlike a Spectrum game. The chunky,multicoloured graphics, the impressive scrolling, the funky snow effect- it just doesn't seem right. I have to assume someone involved met the devil at crossroads and sold their immortal soul in exchange for terrible coding powers. Good deal, if so.

But technical prowess aside, it's also a fun little puzzler that plays unlike almost anything else. The oddly-named Plyuk clones himself by pressing up, depositing a copy under his feet. Thus he climbs, and can reabsorb his clones by pressing down. There's no jumping, and limited clone energy, so you must be careful not to waste any clones as you backtrack. There's a hint of Solomon's Key, and also 2022's Ringo in the gameplay, and it all works wonderfully. I didn't have any of the control sensitivity issues that m'colleague reports, although I can agree that maybe the first few levels are too easy. But that makes me feel clever, which is a rare and wonderful thing. A treat, frankly.





It's always in the last place you Plyuk

Hysteria aside, it's another 'big chunky graphics' title by the godlike Denis Grachev. That's alright then, £48 saved, sorry Microsnips!

Ah it's like that Ringo game he did, very unusual visually, but technically impressive and fun to play. Wonder if he's forsaken normal size graphics and turned into a latter day Don Priestley? Well why not, he's done so many cracking Speccy games in his time, he's surely earned the right to "go big or go home".

So it's as ace as you'd expect but I like to offer a balanced view, so I'll end on a negative. The bigness of the graphics give me a headache after a bit, so I might have to invest in some bigger eyes. That aside, Plyuk is no lame dyuk."

Glossary

‘What are these awful nerds talking about?’, you may ask yourself. Fair question.

If you’re not yet quite fully immersed in the Spectruverse, there may well some terminology that needs explaining.

Let’s try.

ULA+

To define ULA+, we need to define a ULA, which is short for Uncommited Logic Array, which is the chip in a ZX Spectrum that connects the CPU to the other parts, including the Display, Tape ports and Keyboard.

ULA+ is an enhanced design of ULA, included in some hardware projects and also supported by certain emulators.

In practice, it mostly enhances the display, allowing up to 260 colours.

Is that still a Spectrum though? Not really, if you ask me. My notional ULA++ design adds a V12 engine and fibre-glass hull, allowing your ZX Spectrum to achieve speeds of well over 50 knots on calm water. Bit of a challenge for emulators, I concede.

https://sinclair.wiki.zxnet.co.uk/wiki/ULAplus ← Caution : Nerd stuff

MPAGD

Multi Platform Arcade Game Designer. A software package for Windows which allows creation of games for the Spectrum as well as other less spiritually pure 8-bit platforms.

It’s free, flexible, easy to use and requires no prior programming knowledge.Pretty neat, although a couple of the MPAGD games this issue have had dodgy redefine keys options. Maybe watch for that if you’re inspired to try it.

https://jonathan-cauldwell.itch.io/multi-platform-arcade-game-designer

POKE

As well as inspiring endless childish jokes, the POKE command in ZX BASIC simply applies a value to a given address in memory.

For games, this is typically used by DISGUSTING CHEATS to make games easier, by granting extra / infinite lives or soup or whatever.

On a real Spectrum, one would typically do this by interrupting the load process after the header, editing the simple BASIC commands to add a POKE immediately before running the loaded program. This had the added bonus of making a 10-year-old feel like they were a ‘computer wiz-kid’, which is what nerds were called before the invention of l33t hax0rs.

In these modern times, you’re more likely to be applying in an emulator - each will be slightly different. In Fuse, for instance, the option is on the menu under Machine…Poke Memory

ZXGM (ZX Spectrum Game Maker)

Another popular engine for making games. This one is entirely code-free, and allows for creation of some impressive titles, although currently restricted to side-on platform games. A relatively new project, this is continually developing with support from an enthusiastic community.

https://gm.retrojuegos.org

GAC (Graphic Adventure Creator)

A commercial program from the 80s that allowed anyone to create text adventures, with illustrations. The engine is functional if slightly clumsy. Here at Break Space, we tend to prefer PAW

https://www.ifwiki.org/Graphic_Adventure_Creator

PAW (Professional Adventure Writer)

A commercial program from the 80s that allowed anyone to create text adventures, with illustrations. Preferred to GAC, and Crash agreed back in issue 50.

https://www.crashonline.org.uk/50/advent.htm

DAAD

If we're talking about GAC and PAW, we need to cover DAAD. This allows you to write text adventures games for the Speccy on your modern PC, with export available to multiple 8- and 16-bit platforms.
You can even use the web platform Adventuron to prototype. Probably the way to go if you fancy writing a text game.

https://github.com/daad-adventure-writer/daad
https://adventuron.io

Boriel Basic / ZX-Boriel

A PC package which allows you to use a more modern version of BASIC to write Spectrum games, and then export them as machine-code. This should give you both the ease of programming in BASIC and the speed of running in native machine code.

https://www.boriel.com/pages/the-zx-basic-compiler.html

Krasplib

A library that sits atop Boriel Basic, simplifying the development process.

https://krappygamez.itch.io/krasplib

Z88

After the Spectrum, Sir Clive Sinclair set up Cambridge Computing to launch this portable proto-laptop. It ran on 4 AA batteries, and had an 8-line, 640x64 LCD screen.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambridge_Z88

Didaktik

One of many ZX Spectrum clones released mostly in the Eastern Block. Almost but not quite 100% compatible. See also the Pentagon, Scorpion, Hobbit and so on.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didaktik

AY vs Beeper sound effects & music

Audio on the original 16k or 48k Spectrums is courtesy of a built in Beeper that was what you'd call 1-bit : it is either on or off. You get different tones by switching it on & off very quickly.
The 128k models added a dedicated AY sound chip that allows for much more sophisticated audio/music, and also used your TV's speakers, rather than honking away in the darkness of the Speccy case like the poor old Beeper.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Instrument_AY-3-8910

MK1

Yet another game engine to simplify the game creation process, using a mix of C and Assembly language. Requires more technical nouse than the others mentioned.Also known as 'La Churrera', which is a machine for mass producing Churros, the deep fried, delicious, donutty delicacy.

https://github.com/mojontwins/MK1

Emulators

Whle you can play these games on a real-life Speccy or other hardware (TheSpectrum, for instance), you may want to use an emulator on your PC or other device. We use FUSE, SPIN, and Spectaculator mostly. There are dozens to choose from. And people writing new ones constantly, not sure why.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14XnVBY8a9-IMtNC9RxUth_HPl8_b0ncq-VCq1NmfOsg/edit?=0#gid=0

The End

of the beginning

0 OK, 10:4

So there you have it.
Issue 1 of Break Space.
We all hope you've enjoyed it!
(or if you're one of those people that likes to read magazines from the back first, that you will enjoy it. Weirdo.)

I started getting the team together on Feb 24th, and it's April 23rd as I type up this end page, co-incidentally the ZX Spectrum's 43rd birthday. Spooky.
I think we've done pretty darn well in 8 weeks.
I'd like to thank the team for their 5-Star efforts.

Got any comments, suggestions, complaints? Mail BreakSpaceInbox@gmail.com and we'll consider your points - and may publish your wise words in a future issue.

Mpk

Next Time :

Stacks more reviews, including :
Frogger RX
Chump Town
Ziona Quest 2
and at least 2 Tetris games

Plus whatever else our fevered minds come up with.

Watch the skies, 3 months from now

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Those are supposed to be sheep on the cover. They kind of look like rats, the more I look at them. Sorry.
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